NATION
Mizoram-Myanmar locals need pass to cross border
≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS
Indian tech firms corner 1/5th of US H1B visas
≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS
Play domestic cricket: Gambhir to seniors
≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in www.magzter.com 6 JANUARY 2025 | MONDAY | BENGALURU | 5 RAJAB, 1446 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 6| Pages: 8

CONGRESS GOVT TAKING 60% COMMISSION: HDK

He says ministers are taking bribes, even in house allocations

MYSURU, 5 JAN

Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel HD Kumaraswamy on Sunday alleged that the commission percentage has reached 60 per cent in the Congress-led Karnataka government.

Speaking to media in Mysuru on Sunday, Kumaraswamy claimed that bribery has become rampant in even in the allocation of housing for the poor.

Kumaraswamy said, "Even Congress workers have admitted that 60 per cent commission and bribes are being collected under Congress government."

"Earlier, it was Panchayat Development Officers (PDOs) who collected bribes. But now, ministers in Vidhana Soudha are openly accepting bribes. Is this what you call Satyameva Jayate? For them (Congress), Satyameva Jayate is merely an advertising slogan," he mocked.

Kumaraswamy questioned the sincerity of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's government in upholding the principles of honesty and integrity.

Kumaraswamy went on to criticize Siddaramaiah's administration, accusing it of "looting public funds" and questioned the government's commitment to Mahatma Gandhi's principle of truth. "Is there no limit to their greed?" he asked.

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy questioned the sincerity of CM Siddaramaiah's govt in upholding the principles of integrity **PHOTO: PTI**

The Union Minister also spoke about the plight of contractors in the state, claiming that even those who supported Congress were now lamenting that the previous BJP government was better. "Siddaramaiah and the Congress will have to pay a heavy price for this in the coming days," he warned.

On the issue of public welfare, Kumaraswamy expressed concern over the recent decision by the Congress government to increase bus fares by 15%. He criticized the government's approach to its five guarantees, alleging that it was looking for excuses to halt them. "Under no circumstances should these guarantees be stopped. The government is snatching them away from the very people who voted you into power," he said.

"The fare hike will burden the ordinary man. No minister's children or MLA's children travel by government buses. Only the common people do. An additional Rs 10 per day is a huge burden for them," he added. He criticised the ministers for dismissing concerns over the fare hike with callous remarks, questioning their understanding of the hardships faced by the poor and middle-class families. "Do they even understand how malnourished children are struggling? What about programs to address malnutrition?" he asked. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

Ask him to prove that 60 per cent commission is taking place and there is corruption. Not just making allegations, one has to prove it

-Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Rescue work underway after a helicopter of the Coast Guard crashed during landing at Porbandar airport on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Coast Guard chopper crashes in Guj, 3 dead

PORBANDAR, 5 JAN

A routine training sortie turned tragic on Sunday when an Indian Coast Guard helicopter crashed on the runway of Porbandar airport, resulting in the deaths of two pilots and a crew member. The incident occurred around 12.15pm local time.

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) confirmed that the helicopter, an ALH MK-III designated CG 859, experienced a mishap while attempting to land. Three crew members were onboard at the time: Commandant (JG) Saurabh, Deputy Commandant SK Yadav, and Navik Manoj Pradhan. Despite immediate rescue efforts and their transfer to Bhavsinh Civil Hospital in Porbandar, all three were pronounced dead upon arrival.

Details from Porbandar Superintendent of Police Bhagirathsinh Jadeja indicate that the helicopter crashed as it was returning to land, igniting a fire at the runway's edge. Emergency responders acted quickly, but none of the crew survived their severe injuries.

The Indian Coast Guard has announced that the reasons behind the crash are under investigation by a Board of Inquiry.

In a statement, the ICG expressed their sorrow over the loss, stating that the deceased will be honoured and cremated according to service traditions. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Namo Bharat reaches Delhi as PM opens 13km RRTS

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

The Namo Bharat train entered the national capital on Sunday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating a 13-km section of the Delhi-Meerut RRTS corridor from Sahibabad in Ghaziabad to New Ashok Nagar here. Modi also took a ride on a Namo Bharat train from Sahibabad to New Ashok Nagar. During his journey, the prime minister interacted with people, including children. With the inauguration of the Delhi section of the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor, Meerut city is now directly connected to Delhi and commuters can reach Meerut South in just 40 minutes. The 55-km RRTS corridor between New Ashok Nagar and Meerut South with 11 stations has become operational. Passenger operations will commence from 5 pm onwards and trains will be available every 15 minutes. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

CRITERIA FOR RECRUITMENT OF ANTI-SIKH RIOT VICTIMS RELAXED

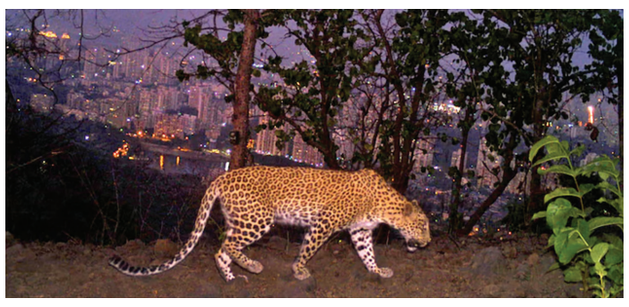
NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

The Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, Vinai Kumar Saxena, has approved significant relaxations in educational and age qualifications for 88 applicants seeking employment as Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS) from victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. This decision, announced by the Delhi LG office, responds to persistent appeals from the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and various public representatives.

Previously, the LG had granted full relaxation of educational qualifications for 50 applicants and age relaxation for 22 others. A special recruitment drive by the Revenue Department conducted in 2006 resulted in 72 applicants being appointed, while an additional 22 received age relaxations.

Saxena noted that a rehabilitation package for the victims was sanctioned by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, back in January 2006. *—ANI*

Leopard spotted near Infosys again



The leopard was initially spotted on CCTV cameras between 2am and 4am on 31 December **PHOTO: X**

MYSURU, 5 JAN

A leopard was sighted once again on the Infosys campus in Hebbal on Saturday by commuters passing along the campus road, intensifying concerns over the presence of the big cat in the area.

The leopard was initially spotted on CCTV cameras between 2am and 4am on 31 December, after which the Infosys team advised employees to work from home. Following the sighting, the Forest Department, along with the Leopard Task Force, launched a search operation using thermal drones in an attempt to capture the elusive animal. However, despite their efforts, the leopard managed to evade the authorities.

On 4 January, the leopard was again seen crossing the road inside the Infosys campus. Forest Department assured the public that they are doing everything possible to ensure the safety of the animal and people.*—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

4 Naxalites, cop killed in Chhattisgarh

DANTEWADA, 5 JAN

Four Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, a senior police official said on Sunday. A head constable of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) was also killed in the face-off, he said. The gunfight broke out on Saturday at a forest in south Abujhmaad along the border of Narayanpur and Dantewada districts when a joint team of the DRG and Special Task Force (STF) was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, the official said. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Will make roads as soft as Priyanka's cheeks: BJP leader

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Senior BJP leader and party's candidate from Kalkaji, Ramesh Bidhuri, has yet again courted controversy by allegedly saying that after victory in the Delhi Assembly polls next month, he will develop smooth roads in the constituency like Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi's "cheeks". No reaction of Bidhuri was available over his remarks and the attack on him by the Congress.

"I assure you that just as we made the roads in Okhla and Sangam Vihar, we will make all the roads in Kalkaji like Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks," Bidhuri is heard saying in the purported video, which went viral on social media. Congress candidate from Kalkaji and Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba lashed out at Bidhuri and accused him of "insulting" women once again in his "usual indecent language". *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Bangladesh cancels planned training of judges in India

DHAKA, 5 JAN

Bangladesh's interim government has cancelled a planned training programme for 50 judges and judicial officers in India, retracting a previous notification. A spokesman for the law ministry confirmed the cancellation but did not provide further details.

According to The Daily Star, the decision was made in line with a directive from Bangladesh's Supreme Court. The cancellation was announced just a day after state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha reported that the judges were scheduled to receive one day of training on 10 February at the National Judicial Academy and the State Judicial Academy in Madhya Pradesh.

The judges earmarked for the programme included district and sessions judges, additional district and sessions judges, joint district judges, senior assistant judges, and assistant judges.

The costs associated with the training had been set to be covered by the Indian government.Relations between India and Bangladesh have soured following significant political upheaval in Bangladesh, starting with the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who sought refuge in New Delhi on 5 August amidst widespread student-led protests. Since the interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, took charge on 8 August, there have been increasing tensions, including violence against the Hindu community in Bangladesh. New Delhi has expressed concern regarding incidents such as the arrest of a Hindu monk on sedition charges, which has further strained diplomatic ties. *—PTI*

CHITRA SANTHE IS HERE

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday inaugurated the 22nd edition of Chitra Santhe and urged people to visit the fair and support artists. The event, organised by Chitrakala Parishath, features the theme of 'The Girl Child' this year. Hundreds of people attend the art fair **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

INDIA'S BIG FLOP

Aussies knock India out of WTC final; reclaim BGT after 10yrs

Australia pose with Border Gavaskar Trophy after defeating India in the fifth cricket test at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

SYDNEY, 5 JAN

Australia decisively reclaimed the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, defeating an out-of-sorts India by six wickets in the final Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

This victory not only crowned Australia as the series winners with a 3-1 margin but also secured their place in the World Test Championship final against South Africa, scheduled at Lord's from June 11 to 15.

India set a target of 162, which became increasingly daunting after Jasprit Bumrah was rendered unable to bowl due to severe back spasms. Without their new Test captain, India struggled to defend their total effectively. Virat Kohli led the team onto the field, but their chances of success diminished rapidly. Bumrah's remarkable series haul of 32 wickets earned him the player of the series accolade, although it provided little consolation for a deeply flawed team performance.

Bumrah expressed his frustration at missing the opportunity to bowl in what many deemed the series' best conditions. Prasidh Krishna and Mohammed Siraj failed to match Bumrah's impact, allowing the Australian batsmen to comfortably chase down the target in just 27 overs. With contributions from Usman Khawaja, Travis Head, and debutant Beau Webster, India's batting frailties were laid bare, highlighting their overreliance on Bumrah. Despite a fighting 61 from Rishabh Pant, an inept showing resulted in just 157 runs from the Indian innings, with only two players breaking double-digit scores outside of Pant. The dismal performance has prompted serious reflections amongst the Indian cricket establishment regarding the state of the team.

Key veterans, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, struggled throughout the series, with their technique under scrutiny. Jaiswal emerged as a promising talent despite several low scores, while Nitish Kumar Reddy offered glimpses of potential. However, questions loom over the future of both Rohit and Kohli.

Under the leadership of head coach Gautam Gambhir, India recorded six Test defeats in ten matches this term, raising concerns about his suitability across formats. With the team in a transition phase, any accountability given to the players must also extend to the coaching staff. As India grapples with its bowling composition and overall team strategy, the emergence of young talent like Jaiswal and Reddy remains a hopeful sign amidst an otherwise challenging landscape. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 8

Lokayukta officials nab ASI for bribery

BENGALURU, 5 JAN

The Lokayukta police apprehended an Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) and his accomplice while they were accepting a bribe from an auto-rickshaw driver to release a vehicle seized unlawfully. According to a complaint filed with the Lokayukta, the auto-rickshaw belonging to Mohammed Shujat, a resident of Kadugondanahalli (KG Halli), had been unlawfully seized by the police several weeks ago. Despite repeated requests from Shujat to release his vehicle, Vijay Kumar, an ASI attached to the Sanjay Nagar police station, allegedly demanded a bribe of Rs 50,000 to return the auto-rickshaw. Acting on the complaint, the Lokayukta police set a trap to nab the errant officer. As instructed, Shujat met ASI Vijay Kumar on Saturday evening and offered Rs 40,000 as part of the bribe. Another individual, identified as Syed Rizwan, was present alongside the ASI during the transaction. As the ASI and Rizwan accepted the money, the Lokayukta police caught them red-handed. Both individuals have been detained and are currently undergoing interrogation. Further investigations are underway to ascertain the extent of their involvement in corrupt practices *—Salar News*

Minister urges girls to learn martial arts

MYSURU, 5 JAN

Social Welfare and District In-Charge Minister, HC Mahadevappa, emphasised the importance of martial arts for physical well-being at the 19th State-Level Karate Championship organised by Naga Martial Arts Academy at Chamundi Vihar Stadium, Mysuru, on Sunday. He urged girls in schools to learn karate for self-defence and encouraged karate enthusiasts to draw inspiration from Muhammad Ali, the world's first fighter to win the heavyweight championship three times. The event also saw the release of the academy's annual calendar. Historian PV Nanjaraj Urs, academy founder Sosale Siddaraju, ACP Pratap Reddy, and Assistant Director for Youth Empowerment and Sports, Bhaskar, were present at the event *—Salar News*

Man assaults cop in Nelamangala, video goes viral

MYSURU, 5 JAN

A viral video from Nagamangala town, Mandya district, shows an accused assaulting ASI Raju, an on-duty officer from Nagamangala Rural Police Station. The accused, Pujari Krishna from Majjanakoppal village, was reported by his mother for allegedly torturing her. Raju found him near TB Circle on Saturday and requested him to visit the station, Krishna refused, demanded an FIR, and said he would come with his lawyer. An argument ensued, and Krishna assaulted the officer. He was arrested and remanded to judicial custody, with cases filed for assault and torture *—Salar News*

Youth held for brandishing knife on Instagram

MYSURU, 5 JAN

Udayagiri Police arrested a youth from Ghousianagar on charges of brandishing a large knife during his birthday celebration and posting the act on his Instagram account. The accused, Tabreez, celebrated his birthday on 2 January with friends. During the party, he used a knife typically meant for slaughtering animals to cut his cake and was seen brandishing it. He later shared photos of the act on Instagram. Santosh Pawar, a local resident, filed a complaint after noticing the posts. Following verification of the Instagram content, Udayagiri Police arrested Tabreez for possessing a weapon without permission and causing public fear by brandishing it. *—Salar News*

CM challenges HDK to prove corruption charges

He said allegations should not be made without evidence

DAVANGERE, 5 JAN

With Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy accusing his government of corruption and ministers of extracting commission, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday challenged the JD(S) leader to prove his allegations with evidence.

He said allegations should not be made without documents and proof.

"Let him prove it. Ask him to prove that 60 per cent commission is taking place and there is corruption. Let him prove it. Not just making allegations, one has to prove it," Siddaramaiah told reporters here, responding to a question. He said the opposition's job is not only to make the allegations, they should also prove it with evidence and documents.

Speaking to reporters in Mysuru, Kumaraswamy targeted the Siddaramaiah-led government and accused it of corruption and extracting commission, while alleging that ministers themselves are involved in this. "Contractors supporting them (Congress party) are themselves saying that it (commission) has crossed 60 per cent and the earlier government was better... the loot is happening at PWD or irrigation departments. While getting contracts is one part, now even for allotment of houses, it seems money has to be paid...

"Earlier, small officers were involved, but now it is happening at Vidhana Soudha. Ministers have to be paid for release of houses...at every department percentage is fixed...," Kumaraswamy alleged as he highlighted the suicide of officials and contractors.

On the recent hike in bus fares, Siddaramaiah said, bus fares have increased during all governments, considering the salaries of employees, the increase in diesel prices, the cost of purchase of new buses and also inflation.

He said, "Bus fares were increased long ago, and as we were told that all our road transport corporations are in distress, and as there was a long standing demand, we have increased." Questioning whether there was no hike when BJP or Kumaraswamy was in power, the CM said, "Let them say they had not increased fares. Hasn't the central government increased railway fares?" *—PTI*

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy accused Siddaramaiah-led government of extracting commission, alleging that ministers were involved **PHOTO: PTI**

> On the recent hike in bus fares, CM said, bus fares have increased during all governments, considering the salaries of employees, the increase in diesel prices, the cost of purchase of new buses and also inflation

DUE TO TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

Mangaluru to get Doppler Weather Radar by Jan: IMD

BENGALURU, 5 JAN

The launch of Karnataka's first C Band Doppler Weather Radar (DWR) in Mangaluru, initially set for completion by 15 January, has been postponed because of technical difficulties, according to N Puviarasan, head of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Bengaluru centre. Puviarasan expressed hopes that the radar would be operational by the end of January.

The announcement came during a stakeholders' workshop held on January 4 at the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Management Centre (KSNDMC) to celebrate 150 years of IMD.

During the event, it was noted that the IMD has faced challenges in establishing an S-band DWR in Bengaluru due to difficulties in land acquisition.

Originally intended for Nandi Hills, the site search for the Bengaluru radar has moved at the request of Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje, but the proposed location has proved unsuitable due to elevation concerns. Currently, a government school site is under consideration, which may expedite the process.

The Mangaluru radar, located near Kadri, is expected to cover a radius of 250-300 km, targeting areas in Karnataka that are prone to heavy monsoon rains.

Overall, Karnataka has relied on radars from Goa, Hyderabad, and Chennai for accurate weather forecasts, leading to an urgent need for the new technology.

In addition to the Mangaluru radar, an X-band DWR is being developed in Dharwad, with proposals for further installations across Karnataka.

Without a DWR, Karnataka has been depending on the radars in Goa, Hyderabad and Chennai for more accuracy in forecasts for thunderstorms and rainfall so far, said IMD officials. *—PTI*

Wild tusker rescued using radio collar in Nagarahole

MYSURU, 5 JAN

Forest officials rescued a 30-year-old wild tusker trapped between cement barricades at Mudaganur Lake, near Veeranahosahalli, within the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve early on Sunday. The elephant, which had strayed into farmland and caused crop damage over the past fortnight, became ensnared while attempting to return to the forest.

Using signals from a radio collar—fitted to the elephant in 2021 and known as Nagarahole Elephant-1—officials were guided to its location. Nagarahole DCF Seema and ACF Lakshmikanth employed an earthmover to dislodge the barricades, allowing the animal to escape safely. Seema noted that the installation of radio collars has proven invaluable for tracking and rescuing elephants.

Currently, 10 elephants in the state are fitted with these devices. The damaged barricades will be repaired and replaced, according to Veeranahosahalli Range Forest Officer Abhishekh. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

They should not have been granted bail: Techie's father

SAMASTIPUR, 5 JAN

Pawan Kumar Modi, father of deceased Atul Subhash on Sunday said that his wife Nikita Singhania, Nisha Singhania and brother-in-law Anurag Singhania should not have been granted bail.

He said "Bail has been granted to them under legal process, but they shouldn't have been granted bail. I am really worried about my grandson and where he is. We are informed that he is in a boarding school in Faridabad... he has been admitted to the school at a very young age which is illegal. The mother has no love for her child. She is just using him as an ATM to extort money..." *—ANI*

SPIRITUAL SOJOURN

Dalai Lama arrives in Bylakuppe for month-long stay

MYSURU, 5 JAN

Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, arrived at the Bylakuppe Tibetan settlement in Mysuru district on Sunday as part of his South India tour. He began his journey from the main Tibetan temple in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, accompanied by a convoy of vehicles.

Senior officials of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), along with monks, nuns, and laypeople, warmly welcomed the Dalai Lama. Roads leading from the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery were lined with devotees holding ceremonial scarves and incense, seeking his blessings.

In Dharamshala, key CTA leaders, including Kalon Norzin Dolma of the Department of Information and International Relations, Tibetan parliamentarians, and other officials, gathered at the Dalai Lama's residence to bid him farewell.

Bylakuppe, one of the largest Tibetan settlements in India, witnessed thousands of devotees, including monks, nuns, schoolchildren, and laypeople, gathering to receive blessings during his monthlong stay. During this period, the Dalai Lama will limit his interactions to spiritual gatherings and will not participate in public meetings.

The Bylakuppe police have made extensive security arrangements to ensure the safety of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate. *—Salar News*

AGAINST BUS FARE HIKE

Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist) members protest against the State government for bus fare hike, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

City man dies by suicide after killing mother

BENGALURU, 5 JAN

A 21-year-old man died by suicide after allegedly killing his mother in Chandapura on the outskirts of Bengaluru.

The deceased have been identified as Ramesh and his mother, Lakshmi Devi, 41, both natives of Chikkahalli in Chitradurga district. According to police, the incident took place on Saturday night.

Lakshmi Devi and her husband, Manjanna, had moved to Bengaluru with their son seven years ago and were residing in a rented house in Chandapura. While Manjanna worked at a private firm, Lakshmi Devi was employed as a domestic worker in the neighbourhood.

Scene of Crime Officers (SOCO) revealed that Ramesh had been battling epilepsy and was under medication.

However, neighbours claimed that he often skipped his medication and was reportedly addicted to alcohol.

The incident occurred around 10.30pm when Ramesh returned home intoxicated and began arguing with his mother.

Ramesh allegedly strangled Lakshmi Devi with a mobile phone charging cable. Ramesh's father Manjanna, found both his wife and son dead. *—Salar News*

Rowdy-sheeter arrested in B'luru after 10 years

BENGALURU, 5 JAN

Bengaluru police arrested notorious rowdy-sheeter Syed Chand Pasha on Sunday as part of an intensified crackdown on drug peddling. Pasha, who had been evading authorities after jumping bail, was initially apprehended in 2015 under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act for interstate drug trafficking. After being released on bail, he went into hiding.

Investigations into city-wide drug activities led authorities to Pasha, who was reportedly procuring narcotics from Andhra Pradesh and other states to distribute in Bengaluru.

With at least 13 drug-related cases registered against him in Bengaluru West and South divisions, Pasha was arrested on 3 January after the Chamarajpet police obtained permission from the Bengaluru Police Commissioner.

Meanwhile, he has been sent to Bengaluru Central Prison. *—Salar News*

1,500 ARTISTS IN ATTENDANCE

CM inaugurates 'Chitra Santhe', urges support for artists

BENGALURU, 5 JAN

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah launched the 22nd edition of Chitra Santhe on Sunday, calling on the public to visit the art fair and support local artists by purchasing their creations. Organised by the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, this year's event centres on the theme "The Girl Child," aiming to raise awareness about the need to combat the abuse of women and girls while promoting their rights.

With around 1,500 artists from across India participating, Chitra Santhe features a striking 35-foot sculpture of a girl's face, made from cardboard sheets, as one of its key highlights.

Siddaramaiah commended the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath for its significant role in preserving and promoting the state's cultural heritage. He praised the event as a source of pride for Bengaluru, noting, "Artists from 22 states are taking part in this Chitra Santhe. I haven't seen such an event anywhere else in the world; according to the organisers, there is likely no comparable event globally."

Art exhibitors and visitors at the annual art fair 'Chitra Santhe' at Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath in Bengaluru on Sunday. Chitra Santhe is held on the first Sunday of every January. This year's event centres on the theme The Girl Child, aiming to raise awareness about the need to combat the abuse of women and girls **PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD**

He further emphasised that the Chitra Santhe presents a unique opportunity for art lovers, as approximately 400,000 visitors attend the day-long celebration. "This is a fantastic chance for people to support artists by purchasing their work," he remarked.

The Chief Minister also highlighted the event's commitment to the girl child, acknowledging the contributions of women freedom fighters and social reformers. Siddaramaiah noted that his administration has initiated schemes such as 'Shakti' and 'Gruha Lakshmi' to bolster women's empowerment socially and economically.

To manage the anticipated large crowds, Bengaluru's traffic police have implemented traffic and parking restrictions around the Chitrakala Parishath and Kumara Krupa Road for the duration of Sunday's event. *—PTI*

BJP functionary shoots himself dead in MP

DATIA, 5 JAN

A functionary of BJP allegedly committed suicide by shooting himself with a licensed weapon in Madhya Pradesh's Datia city on Sunday, police said. The deceased, Jitendra Mevafarosh, was the general secretary of the BJP's district unit, an official said. Mevafarosh returned from a temple and allegedly shot himself in the head with his licensed gun around 10 am, Kotwali police station in-charge Dhirendra Mishra said. He said a family member has claimed that Mevafarosh was under pressure from some persons over money transactions, and they were also pressuring him to sell his house, The official said further investigation is underway to ascertain the exact cause for the extreme step. —*PTI*

Uttarakhand: Cong leaders join BJP ahead of civic polls

DEHRADUN, 5 JAN

In a setback to the Congress ahead of the urban local body polls in Uttarakhand, several senior party leaders, including state unit vice-president Mathura Dutt Joshi, joined the BJP. Joshi was said to be sulking after the party high command denied his wife the ticket for the mayoral seat in Pithoragarh. Other leaders who crossed over to the BJP are former Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) vice-president Bittu Karnataka and two-time former district panchayat president Jagat Singh Khati. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and Pradesh BJP president Mahendra Bhatt welcomed the leaders into the saffron fold at the party's state office here on Saturday. Urban local body polls in Uttarakhand are scheduled for 23 January. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Drone falls close to Odisha CM during Jharsuguda visit

BHUBANESWAR, 5 JAN

In a major security lapse, a drone deployed by the administration to take photographs of Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Manjhi accidentally crashed on the ground close to him during his visit to Jharsuguda, an official said on Sunday. The incident which occurred on 2 January came to light during the day after a video clip of the incident was circulated on social media platforms. "As per preliminary investigation, the drone was deployed by the district administration to take photographs and record video of the chief minister and other dignitaries during the visit. Due to some technical glitches, it accidentally fell near to the CM," said the police officer of Jharsuguda district. —*PTI*

BJP says China annexed Indian land under Nehru

BJP reacted after Cong said, 'China took land, PM gave clean chit'

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

BJP on Sunday flayed the Congress for alleging Chinese occupation of the Indian territory during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's term and said the grand old party cannot get away with "such lies" as all of it occurred during Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure.

BJP's reaction came a day after the Congress alleged in a post on X, "China kept occupying India's land. Narendra Modi kept giving clean chit."

Reacting sharply, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said the Congress has the "dishonesty" to speak of Chinese annexation of the Indian territory despite the fact that all of it occurred during Nehru's tenure as the prime minister.

BJP IT department head Amit Malviya PHOTO: ANI

"Imagine blaming Prime Minister Modi for Nehru's betrayal," he said in a post on X.

" Congress cannot get away with such lies, even if Rahul Gandhi thinks otherwise," he added.

Malviya said the "reality" is that He'an County is the new name for Aksai Chin, which China occupied by 1962.

The Hekang County refers to the adjacent territory, he said.

"The significance of He'an County lies in the G219 Highway, which China formally opened in 1957. Prime Minister Nehru acknowledged its construction in Parliament in 1959," Malviya said.

The "key features" of the He'an County include Haji Langar, occupied by China in 1959 and an Indian patrol was detained here in 1958, he said.

"Qizil Jilga, captured by China in 1962. Chung Tash, occupied by China in 1962. Dehra Compas, taken over by China in 1961. Shamal Lungpa, seized by China in October 1959, close to the site of a 1959 attack on an Indian patrol," Malviya said. —*PTI*

Nitish snubs Lalu's offer on alliance

PATNA, 5 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has openly rebuked the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), led by his rival Lalu Prasad Yadav, declaring that his past alliances with the party were made "by mistake" and that they achieved little during their time in power.

Kumar's remarks came in response to Prasad's recent comments suggesting that the RJD was keeping "doors open" for a renewed partnership with the Janata Dal (United) [JD(U)], which has recently re-joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Speaking to reporters during a state-wide "Pragati Yatra" in Muzaffarpur, Kumar stated, "Those who were in power before us... did they do anything? People used to fear stepping out of their homes after sunset. I had by mistake ('galti se') aligned with them a couple of times." He emphasised the improvements in women's empowerment through self-help groups, known as Jivika, which were later adopted at the national level as Ajivika.

Kumar declined to answer questions regarding Prasad's remarks, which had elicited mixed reactions, including light-hearted commentary from Tejashwi Yadav, Prasad's son. Meanwhile, the Congress backed the RJD's overtures.

As state gears up for assembly elections in less than a year, uncertainty looms over Kumar's role, with state BJP leaders asserting he will be the NDA's chief ministerial candidate in the 2025 polls. The BJP relies heavily on alliances to maintain its governance at the Centre following a disappointing performance in Lok Sabha. —*PTI*

PM: BJP will retain schemes in Delhi, end corruption

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday accused Delhi's AAP government of wasting a decade fighting with the Centre and urged its people to give the BJP an opportunity to turn the national capital into a city of the future.

The prime minister also assured that no public welfare scheme would be discontinued if the BJP assumed power but the party's government would weed out the corruption in their implementation.

Addressing a rally in the Rohini area, Modi dubbed the AAP government a "disaster" that had struck Delhi and asserted the BJP would usher in change.

"Only when this 'aapda (disaster)' is gotten rid of in Delhi, the double-engine of development will come in," Modi said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during a public meeting, at Rohini, in New Delhi, on Sunday PHOTO: PTI

Meanwhile, Namo Bharat train entered the national capital on Sunday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating a 13-km section of the Delhi-Meerut RRTS corridor from Sahibabad in Ghaziabad to New Ashok Nagar here.

With the inauguration of the Delhi section of the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor, Meerut city is now directly connected to Delhi and commuters can reach Meerut South in just 40 minutes. —*PTI*

FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED

2 BJP leaders killed in Odisha

SAMBALPUR, 5 JAN

The incident happened around 1.30am on NH 53 in Odisha's Sambalpur district, on Sunday PHOTO: X

Two BJP leaders were killed after a dumper hit their car in Odisha's Sambalpur district in the early hours of Sunday, police said.

The deceased were identified as Debendra Nayak and Muralidhar Chhuria. Nayak was BJP's Goshala mandal president, while Chhuria is a former sarpanch. Both of them were close to senior BJP leader Nauri Naik.

The incident happened around 1.30 am on NH 53 in the Burla police station area. There were six people in the car, including the driver, and they were returning home in Kardola from Bhubaneswar, police said.

All six persons were taken to a nearby hospital where doctors declared two of them dead. The injured were undergoing treatment there.

Suresh Chanda, who was injured in the accident, alleged, "The vehicle hit our car from behind twice. Suspecting someone trying to hit our vehicle intentionally, the driver turned the car towards a rural road from the highway near Kantapalli Square. Still, the dumper chased our vehicle and hit it badly. As a result, the car overturned."

"I am sure that someone intentionally caused the accident. By mistake, one can hit a vehicle once. Why would someone be hit thrice from behind?" asked the injured BJP worker.

After visiting the injured persons, Naik, a former MLA of Rengali, alleged that it was not an accident but a deliberate collision. —*PTI*

Bidhuri promises 'roads as smooth as Priyanka's cheeks'

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Senior BJP leader and party's candidate from Kalkaji, Ramesh Bidhuri, has yet again courted controversy by allegedly saying that after victory in the Delhi Assembly polls next month, he will develop smooth roads in the constituency like Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi's "cheeks".

No reaction of Bidhuri was available over his remarks and the attack on him by the Congress.

"I assure you that just as we made the roads in Okhla and Sangam Vihar, we will make all the roads in Kalkaji like Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks," Bidhuri is heard saying in the purported video, which went viral on social media.

Congress candidate from Kalkaji and Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba lashed out at Bidhuri and accused him of "insulting" women once again in his "usual indecent language".

"Will the public in Kalkaji have such (a person) who cares neither for the dignity of the House (Parliament) nor respects the women," she said in a post on X.

She demanded Bidhuri to tender a public apology for his statement and asked the senior BJP leaders to clear their stand on the issue.

The statement was made by Bidhuri during campaigning in Kalkaji. —*PTI*

Kejri: PM's projects reflect Central & Delhi collaboration

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday described the two projects inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as milestones for Delhi's infrastructure and claimed they were joint ventures between the central and the city governments.

During a press conference, Kejriwal congratulated the people of Delhi and asserted that the projects were a collaboration between the city and the central governments.

Taking a dig at his critics, Kejriwal said, "These inaugurations are a reply to those who say AAP only engages in fights."

Referring to challenges faced by his party, he claimed AAP leaders were imprisoned and tortured but maintained their focus on governance. —*PTI*

VP tells youth: Stay vigilant against anti-national forces

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

In a compelling address at the inauguration of the NCC Republic Day Camp in Delhi Cantt, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar urged the nation's youth to remain vigilant against "anti-national forces" to uphold India's democratic values. He emphasised that nationalism must take precedence over personal or organisational interests, stating, "Nation first has to be our only approach."

Dhankhar outlined five foundational pillars for national transformation: social harmony, environmental protection, adherence to civic duties, among others. He stressed the importance of citizens fulfilling their fundamental duties, asserting that the Nation's growth relies on collective commitment to these responsibilities.

With 2,361 cadets, including a record 917 girl cadets, participating in the month-long camp, he applauded their role in fostering unity and discipline. Highlighting India's aspirations to be a developed nation by 2047, Dhankhar remarked, "This vision is no longer a dream; it is our certain destination."

The Vice President noted the nation's rising global reputation and the plethora of opportunities available to the youth, declaring, "We are living at a time when national optimism prevails." He urged the cadets to embody a spirit of service, asserting that their commitment will be crucial for India's future development. —*PTI*

VHP calls Nanded blast acquittal a 'slap' on Cong

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

VHP on Sunday termed the acquittal of the 2006 Nanded blast accused a "tight slap" on the Congress' face and asked the party's top leadership to apologise to Hindu society.

The reaction came after a sessions court in Maharashtra's Nanded acquitted on Saturday all nine surviving accused in the 2006 blast case.

"The Congress' dream of proving Hindus to be terrorists in the 2006 Nanded blast case stands exposed, with the court acquitting all the persons made accused in the case during Congress rule," Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) national spokesperson Vinod Bansal said.

He claimed the Congress and the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) had already been "exposed" in the Malegaon blast case. —*PTI*

NIA arrests PFI cadre for channelising funds from Dubai

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

NIA has arrested a cadre of the Popular Front of India (PFI) for channelising funds from Dubai for the banned outfit to further its unlawful activities in India, an official statement issued on Sunday said. A team of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Mohammad Sajjad Alam of East Champaran district, Bihar, on Saturday as soon as he landed at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport here from Dubai, UAE, it said. According to the NIA, the accused was involved in channelising illegal funds from Dubai to PFI cadres in Bihar through a UAE, Karnataka and Kerala-based syndicate. The funds were used for promoting the banned outfit's criminal and unlawful activities, the NIA said. The case, which was initially registered by Phulwari Sharif police in Bihar in July 2022, relates to cadres' involvement in anti-national activities. —*PTI*

'BJP only national party not owned by any family'

NAGPUR, 5 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

- Fadnavis called BJP a democratic organisation. There are more than 2,300 registered parties in the country but those that are national parties can be counted on fingertips

Maharashtra Chief Minister **Devendra Fadnavis** on Sunday said that the BJP is the only national party that is not "owned" by any family but by its workers.

Speaking at a party event, Fadnavis called BJP a democratic organisation. There are more than 2,300 registered parties in the country but those that are national parties can be counted on fingertips, he said.

There are only two parties – the BJP and the Communist Party of India – that are not owned by any family, he said.

Almost all of the 2,300 parties are privately owned, Fadnavis said.

"The Communist Party of India is no longer a national party. But the BJP is the only national party that is owned by people and party workers. No leader owns the party and it has its own constitution," Fadnavis said. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is a national party.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rise from humble beginnings, Fadnavis said the BJP is the only party where a boy who once sold tea becomes the CM (of Gujarat) and then the PM.

He also launched the party's special membership drive in Nagpur. Fadnavis said BJP has enrolled 11 crore members that have been verified and it has become the world's largest political party. —*PTI*

TN CM: $1M for cracking Indus Valley code

CHENNAI, 5 JAN

The Indus valley script remains an unsolved riddle for over a century, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said here on Sunday and announced a prize of US dollar 1 million to those who decipher it.

Inaugurating a 3-day international conference to mark the centenary of the discovery of the Indus civilisation, Stalin said,"We are still unable to clearly understand the script of the Indus valley civilsation that once flourished."

Efforts are on to this day by scholars to solve the riddle and in order to encourage such efforts, a prize of US dollar 1 million will be provided to individuals or organisations that solves the riddle, he announced. —*PTI*

BPSC HUNGER STRIKE

Prashant Kishor appeals to Rahul, Tejashwi for support

PATNA, 5 JAN

Jan Suraaj chief Prashant Kishor addresses the gathering at the Gandhi Maidan, in Patna, on Sunday PHOTO: PTI

Prashant Kishor, founder of the Jan Suraaj Party, is on day four of a hunger strike demanding the cancellation of a Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) exam. As he continues his 'Amran anshan', he has appealed for support from prominent political figures, including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav.

Describing the agitation as a non-political movement, Kishor revealed that a newly formed 51-member alliance, 'Yuva Satyagraha Samiti' (YSS), aims to advance the cause. He stated, "I want to inform the people that this agitation is non-political and not being carried under the banner of my party... All are welcome to lend support."

Kishor stressed the urgency of the situation, highlighting the potential to mobilise large crowds at Gandhi Maidan if these leaders chose to act. He condemned the state government's heavy-handed response to recent protests, referencing reports of 87 instances of lathi charge in three years.

He also expressed concern over the plight of youth voting for PM Narendra Modi without seeing substantial benefits. Drawing parallels to the farmers' protests in Delhi, he asserted, "One day Nitish government will also have to bow before the youth." —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

NIA raids in Delhi over 'cyber slavery' case

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

The NIA has conducted searches at the home of a recently-arrested accused in Delhi's Jamia Nagar as part of its probe into a human trafficking and cyber slavery case, the agency said in a statement on Sunday. The search on Saturday led to the seizure of digital devices (mobile phones or tablets) and incriminating financial documents, including debit cards, passbooks and cheque books of multiple banks, it said. The case involves a criminal conspiracy by Kamran Haider and other accused engaged in sending vulnerable Indian youth to the Golden Triangle Region in Lao PDR, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) said. The victims of the racket were forced to commit cyber scams in Lao PDR, targeting European and US citizens, it said.—*PTI*

Medico dies after fall from Kochi hostel's 7th floor

KOCHI, 5 JAN

A medical student died after falling from the seventh floor of the hostel building of a private medical college here, police on Sunday said. Fathimath Shahana K was a second-year MBBS student of the Sree Narayana Institute of Medical Sciences in Chalakka here, they added. The incident occurred at 11 pm on Saturday. The initial investigation suggested that she accidentally slipped from the corridor of the seventh floor of the building. However a detailed inquiry and inquest proceedings are underway, they added. Following the incident, the police have reached the spot and launched a probe. A case has been registered for unnatural death, police said. —*PTI*

Mercury dips in J&K, Kokernag freezes at -8.1°C

SRINAGAR, 5 JAN

The night temperature in the valley dipped sharply, with Kokernag town in south Kashmir freezing at minus 8.1 degrees Celsius, officials said on Sunday. In Srinagar, the mercury settled at a low of minus 2.5 degrees Celsius, the Met said. Gulmarg, a tourist resort town known for skiing activities in north Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 4 degrees Celsius. Pahalgam, one of the base camps for the annual Amarnath Yatra in south Kashmir, registered a minimum temperature of minus 3.2 degrees Celsius. Kupwara in north Kashmir registered a night temperature of minus 2.8 degrees Celsius while Kokernag in south Kashmir recorded a low of minus 8.1 degrees and was the coldest place on record in the valley. —*PTI*

Jharkhand suspends classes due to cold wave

RANCHI, 5 JAN

The Jharkhand government announced that schools will remain closed for students from kindergarten to class 8 from 7 to 13 January due to the cold wave in the state. The School Education and Literacy Department, in a notification issued on Saturday evening, announced that the suspension of classes for students till grade 8 will be for all categories of schools, including government, aided, minority and private, in view of prevailing cold wave conditions in the state. Jharkhand continues to reel under cold wave conditions with the mercury falling below 6 degrees Celsius in some parts. The department, further said that classes for students of classes 9 to 12 would be held as usual. Dry weather prevailed in the state during the last 24 hours with the lowest minimum temperature of 5.3 degrees Celsius recorded in Khunti, it said. —*PTI*

Mizoram-Myanmar locals need pass to cross border

On MHA's order, officials are issuing 7-day passes to cross border

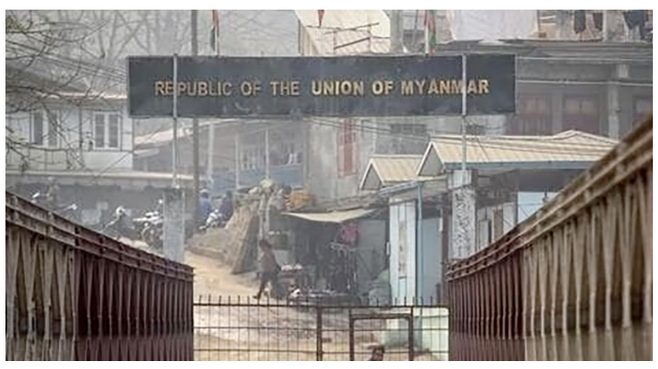
AIZAWL, 5 JAN

Security has been beefed up along the 510km long Mizoram-Myanmar border and movement of people living within 10km on either side of the unfenced international border has been regulated following the directive of the Centre, an official said.

The official said that residents of both countries living within 10km on either side of the border now require border pass to visit each other.

The border pass valid for a stay of up to seven days is being issued to both Myanmarese and Indian citizens visiting each other countries, he said on Saturday.

The initiative was taken by state police, Assam Rifles and health officials at some entry and exit points from 31 December based on the order and new guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), he said.



The border pass valid for a stay of up to seven days is being issued to both Myanmarese and Indian citizens visiting each other countries *PHOTO: PTI*

Six Mizoram districts - Champhai, Siaha, Lawngtlai, Hnahthial, Saitual and Serchhip - share a 510km long border with Myanmar's Chin.

Any resident intending to enter Myanmar or India through Zokhawthar and Hnahlan crossing points and seeking border pass must produce a document or certificate to prove that he or she lives within the 10km radius of the borders, it said.

The identity proof document can be issued by the local police station officer-in-charge or village chief or village authority (administrator) acknowledged by the government and is valid for one year, while the border pass is valid for 7 days only, the notice said..

The border pass will be issued to only one adult, and minors have to be accompanied by parents.

The details of a maximum number of three children can be captured in a single border pass belonging to either parent, while additional border pass will be issued to parents, who bring more than three children, the notice said.

On 24 December, MHA issued a new protocol restricting and reducing the range of movement regime (FMR) from the earlier 16 km to the present 10 km. —*PTI*

The national capital's minimum temperature was recorded at 9.4 degrees Celsius, two notches above normal *PHOTO: PTI*

Dense fog delays flights in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

More than 100 flights were delayed this morning at Indira Gandhi International Airport due to adverse weather conditions caused by dense fog that has blanketed the capital for a third consecutive day. Officials reported that, despite no diversions or cancellations, low visibility procedures were in effect, significantly impacting flight operations.

The fog has led to severe visibility issues, with zero visibility recorded at Palam airport between 4am and 7.30am, as well as a drop to just 0.50 metres at Safdarjung by 5.30am. Consequently, 51 trains were also reported delayed. The Met office advised that the fog conditions show little sign of improvement, predicting dense to very dense fog throughout the day.

In addition to the travel disruptions, Delhi's air quality remained in the 'very poor' category, with an Air Quality Index (AQI) reading of 372 at 9am. This level of pollution can pose serious health risks, as the AQI classifications indicate that scores above 300 are considered 'very poor'.

The capital's minimum temperature was recorded at 9.4 degrees Celsius, two notches above normal, with humidity levels reaching 95 per cent. The maximum temperature is expected to settle around 18 degrees Celsius later today. Passengers are advised to check with airlines for updated flight information as the fog persists. —*PTI*

SPARKS PROTEST

Elephant tramples tribal man to death in Kerala

MALAPPURAM, 5 JAN

A 37-year-old tribal man tragically lost his life after being trampled by a wild elephant while walking through a dense forest near Nilambur, police reported on Sunday.

The incident occurred at the Poochappara settlement in the Karulai forest range when Mani, a member of the Cholanaikkan community, was returning home with a group after dropping his children off at a tribal hostel. Fortunately, despite the sudden attack, the others in the group, which included two elders, three youths aged 18–19, and Mani's five-year-old child, managed to escape unharmed. The attack happened around 6.45pm, and reaching the injured Mani was challenging due to the remote location. His brother rushed to the scene and carried him over 1.5km to reach a vehicle-accessible area. Tragically, despite being taken to the government hospital in Nilambur, Mani succumbed to his injuries.

The incident occurred in the Karulai forest range *PHOTO: ANI*

Kerala's Forest Minister AK Saseendran promised compensation for his family. Meanwhile, local MLA PV Anvar lambasted the government for failing to prevent such incidents. He accused the authorities of neglecting man-animal conflicts and protested outside the District Forest Officer's office. The protest resulted in some damage to the office, but Anvar defended the demonstration as a natural expression of public outrage. —*PTI*

Silver idols stolen from BJP man's Mathura temple

MATHURA, 5 JAN

An unidentified person allegedly stole valuable items, including idols and plates made of silver, from a temple built on the ground floor of a BJP leader's house in the Govind Nagar area here, police said on Sunday.

According to Devpal Singh Pundir, the SHO of Govind Nagar police station, the incident occurred on the intervening night of Friday and Saturday.

"Pradeep Goswami, the general secretary of the city unit of the BJP, was sleeping with his family in their room on the upper floor of their house in Chowk Bazar. Around dawn, a thief broke into the temple on the ground floor and stole silver idols of various gods and goddesses, including those of Lord Shiv, five silver cows, four Sriyantras, 11 plates and other items," the SHO said. —*PTI*

10 flights disrupted at Srinagar airport due to fog

SRINAGAR, 5 JAN

Ten flights were cancelled at Srinagar International Airport on Sunday as dense fog severely restricted visibility to just 50m, officials reported. The poor conditions hampered air traffic, prompting all airlines to delay their departures until after 10am. The impact of the fog was felt on Saturday too, resulting in delays and flight diversions throughout the day. An Airports Authority of India official confirmed that with only slight improvements in visibility, 10 flights have been called off so far, affecting numerous passengers.—*PTI*

4 Naxals, cop killed in Chhattisgarh

DANTEWADA, 5 JAN

Four Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, a senior police official said on Sunday.

A head constable of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) was also killed in the face-off, he said.

The gunfight broke out on Saturday at a forest in south Abujhmaad along the border of Narayanpur and Dantewada districts when a joint team of the DRG and Special Task Force (STF) was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, the official said.

After the exchange of fire stopped late Saturday, bodies of four Naxalites and automatic weapons, including AK-47 rifle and self loading rifle (SLR), were recovered from the spot, he said.

DRG head constable Sannu Karam was also killed in the gunfight, the official said, adding that search operation was still underway in the area.

PHOTO: PTI

The anti-Naxalite operation, comprising the DRG teams from Narayanpur, Dantewada, Kondagaon and Bastar districts, was launched on Friday.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Sunday said the fight will continue to end the Naxal menace.

On 3 January, a Naxalite was killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Gariaband.

Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in separate encounters. —*PTI*

Plea in NGT seeks safe disposal of Carbide waste

BHOPAL/JABALPUR, 5 JAN

A petition has been filed in the National Green Tribunal's (NGT) Bhopal bench, urging the Madhya Pradesh government to assure that the disposal of Union Carbide waste in Pithampur will not harm nearby residents. The petition, filed by a Jabalpur-based social organization, asks the NGT to direct the state's chief secretary to declare on oath the safety of people in Pithampur, where the waste is being disposed.

The waste, about 337 tons, was transported to Pithampur from Bhopal on December 5 for disposal, following an order from the Madhya Pradesh High Court. The petition also seeks a report in Hindi and English newspapers to address public concerns regarding the disposal. The 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, which killed over 5,400 people and left many with long-term health issues, has caused fear among locals. —*PTI*

Allu Arjun appears before cops, 'cancels' hospital visit

HYDERABAD, 5 JAN

Telugu actor Allu Arjun, named as an accused in the case related to the tragic death of a woman during a stampede at the premiere of his latest film Pushpa 2, appeared before the police on Sunday as part of his bail conditions.

The actor appeared before the Station House Officer (SHO) of Chikkadapally police station, completed the court formalities and left, police said.

Arjun, listed as accused No 11 in the case, was granted regular bail by a city court on 3 January. As per the court's directives, the actor is required to appear before SHO, Chikkadpally police station on every Sunday between 10 am and 1 pm for a period of two months or till filing of charge sheet, whichever is earlier.

Additionally, the court instructed the Pushpa star not to change his residential address, without prior intimation to the court, till disposal of the case.

Telugu actor Allu Arjun, accused in stampede case, appears before the Chikkadpally police, in Hyderabad on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

Meanwhile, the SHO of Ramgopalpet Police Station served a notice to Allu Arjun on his proposed plan to the visit the hospital (to visit the boy undergoing treatment) on Sunday asking him to "reconsider" his decision, in view of heightened public interest in this matter, and to ensure minimal disruption to hospital operations and other patients.

The actor, however, cancelled his visit to the hospital citing "advise" from his legal team, official sources said. —*PTI*

IN LETTER TO YOGI

Cleric fears conversions; others flag seers' demand to bar Muslims from Kumbh

LUCKNOW, 5 JAN

Ahead of the Maha Kumbh, a senior cleric has written to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressing fears that mass conversions of Muslims will take place during the event, while other community leaders have flagged the alleged demand raised by some Hindu seers' body to keep Muslims out of the mega gathering.

Last year, the Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad (ABAP) had allegedly given a call to procure goods for the Maha Kumbh exclusively from Hindu shopkeepers to ensure that purchases were made solely from the true followers of Sanatan Dharma.

Devotees arrive at Sangam ahead of Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj *PHOTO: PTI*

Held every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will be organised in Prayagraj from 13 January to 26 February.

All India Muslim Jamaat president Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Barelvi, who was in the spotlight recently for advising Muslims not to visit the Maha Kumbh, urged Adityanath on Friday to "thwart plans" to convert hundreds of Muslims during the event.

Barelvi, who earlier termed the alleged demand to bar Muslims from visiting the Kumbh "undemocratic" and "unconstitutional", put forward a different view on the matter in his letter to Yogi. "The Akhara Parishad and Naga seers held a meeting in November last year, where they talked about banning Muslims from setting up shops at the fair premises. That is why I have advised Muslims not to go to Maha Kumbh to avoid any trouble," he said. —*PTI*

Govt launches 2 special visas for int'l students

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

India has introduced two new special category visas for international students aiming to pursue higher education in the country.

The 'e-student visa' and 'e-student-x visa' are launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs. All applicants must use the 'Study in India' (SII) portal, which was also launched by the government. The e-student visa is available for eligible foreign students who register on the SII portal, while the e-student-x visa is for the dependents of e-student visa holders.

The SII portal facilitates the admission process for international students seeking long-term or short-term courses in India.

Students must apply for a visa through the portal at https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/, where the authenticity of their application will be verified via their SII ID. Therefore, it is mandatory for students to apply to Indian institutions through the SII website.

The e-student visa is granted to foreign nationals who have been admitted to full-time, regular courses in undergraduate, post-graduate, PhD, or other formal programs at institutions recognized by Indian regulatory bodies. These visas are issued for up to five years and are extendable.

The SII project, led by the Ministry of Education, offers access to over 8,000 courses in fields such as engineering, technology, management, and more. —*PTI*

BROKEN KNIFE IN PIZZA

Craving for pizza turned into a nightmare for Pune resident Arun Kapse on Saturday when he found a sharp piece of a knife embedded in his Domino's pizza. Kapse, who ordered the pizza from the Jai Ganesh Empire outlet, was pricked by the fragment while eating. Despite initial dismissal from the outlet manager, the manager later visited Kapse's home, admitted fault, and offered to waive the cost of the pizza in an attempt to prevent the incident from going public

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Despite violations, Israel & Hezbollah truce holds so far

A fragile ceasefire between Israel and the Lebanese group Hezbollah has held up for over a month, even as its terms seem unlikely to be met by the agreed-upon deadline.

The deal struck on 27 November to halt the war required Hezbollah to immediately lay down its arms in southern Lebanon and gave Israel 60 days to withdraw its forces there and hand over control to the Lebanese army and UN peacekeepers.

So far, Israel has withdrawn from just two of the dozens of towns it holds in southern Lebanon. And it has continued striking what it says are bases belonging to Hezbollah, which it accuses of attempting to launch rockets and move weapons before they can be confiscated and destroyed.

Hezbollah, which was severely diminished during nearly 14 months of war, has threatened to resume fighting if Israel does not fully withdraw its forces by the 60-day deadline.

Yet despite accusations from both sides about hundreds of ceasefire violations, the truce is likely to hold, analysts say. That is good news for thousands of Israeli and Lebanese families displaced by the war still waiting to return home.

"The ceasefire agreement is rather opaque and open to interpretation," said Firas Maksad, a senior fellow with the Middle East Institute in Washington. That flexibility, he said, may give it a better chance of holding in the face of changing circumstances, including the ouster of Syria's longtime leader, Bashar Assad, just days after the ceasefire took effect.

With Assad gone, Hezbollah lost a vital route for smuggling weapons from Iran. While that further weakened Hezbollah's hand, Israel had already agreed to the US-brokered ceasefire.

Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on 8 October, 2023. Since then, Israeli air and ground assaults have killed more than 4,000 people in Lebanon, including hundreds of civilians. At the height of the war, more than 1 million Lebanese people were displaced.

So far, Israel has withdrawn from just two of the dozens of towns it holds in southern Lebanon ***PHOTO: PTI***

Hezbollah rockets forced some 60,000 from their homes in northern Israel, and killed 76 people in Israel, including 31 soldiers. Almost 50 Israeli soldiers were killed during operations inside Lebanon.

Here's a look at the terms of the ceasefire and its prospects for ending hostilities over the long-term.

What does the ceasefire agreement say?

The agreement says that both Hezbollah and Israel will halt "offensive" military actions, but that they can act in self-defence, although it is not entirely clear how that term may be interpreted.

The Lebanese army is tasked with preventing Hezbollah and other militant groups from launching attacks into Israel. It is also required to dismantle Hezbollah facilities and weapons in southern Lebanon — activities that might eventually be expanded to the rest of Lebanon, although it is not explicit in the ceasefire agreement.

The United States, France, Israel, Lebanon and the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, are responsible for overseeing implementation of the agreement.

"The key question is not whether the deal will hold, but what version of it will be implemented," Maksad, the analyst, said.

Is the ceasefire being implemented?

Hezbollah has for the most part halted its rocket and drone fire into Israel, and Israel has stopped attacking Hezbollah in most areas of Lebanon. But Israel has launched regular airstrikes on what it says are militant sites in southern Lebanon and in the Bekaa Valley.

Israeli forces have so far withdrawn from two towns in southern Lebanon - Khiam and Shamaa. They remain in some 60 others, according to the International Organisation for Migration, and around 1,60,000 Lebanese remain displaced.

Lebanon has accused Israel of repeatedly violating the ceasefire agreement and last week submitted a complaint to the UN Security Council that says Israel launched some 816 "ground and air attacks" between the start of the ceasefire and 22 December, 2024.

The complaint said the attacks have hindered the Lebanese army's efforts to deploy in the south and uphold its end of the ceasefire agreement.

Israel says Hezbollah has violated the ceasefire hundreds of times and has also complained to the Security Council. It accused Hezbollah militants of moving ammunition, attempting to attack Israeli soldiers, and preparing and launching rockets towards northern Israel, among other things.

Until it hands over control of more towns to the Lebanese army, Israeli troops have been destroying Hezbollah infrastructure, including weapons warehouses and underground tunnels. Lebanese authorities say Israel has also destroyed civilian houses and infrastructure.

What happens after the ceasefire has been in place for 60 days?

Israel's withdrawal from Lebanese towns has been slower than anticipated because of a lack of Lebanese army troops ready to take over, according to Lt Col Nadav Shoshani, a military spokesman. Lebanon disputes this, and says it is waiting for Israel to withdraw before entering the towns.

Shoshani said Israel is satisfied with the Lebanese army's control of the areas it has already withdrawn from, and that while it would prefer a faster transfer of power, security is its most important objective.

Israel does not consider the 60-day timetable for withdrawal to be "sacred", said Harel Chorev, an expert on Israel-Lebanon relations at Tel Aviv University who estimates that Lebanon will need to recruit and deploy thousands more troops before Israel will be ready to hand over control.

Hezbollah officials have said that if Israeli forces remain in Lebanon 60 days past the start of the ceasefire, the militant group might return to attacking them.

But Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Kassem said Wednesday that, for now, the group is holding off to give the Lebanese state a chance to "take responsibility" for enforcing the agreement.

In a speech Friday, he took a more threatening tone.

"Our patience may run out before or after the 60 days," he said. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر بنگلور

Traumatic birth experience can affect breastfeeding

Giving birth can be a moment of intense joy. But for some mothers, the experience of childbirth can be distressing and can bring lasting trauma.

Birth trauma can result from both physical complications and psychological distress. It often arises when mothers feel unsupported, unheard, or out of control during labour. Research suggests that as many as one in three mothers find their experience of giving birth traumatic, and around 4per cent develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This trauma can lead to exhaustion, emotional strain, and prolonged physical recovery.

These birth experiences can also affect breastfeeding. My research has found that that mothers who felt satisfied with their clinical care and perceived their birth experience positively were more likely to breastfeed their children. These mothers were also more likely to continue breastfeeding beyond their baby's first birthday.

Positive care, characterised by feeling respected, supported, and informed, helps build maternal confidence — a key factor in successful breastfeeding.

On the other hand, mothers who experienced distress or dissatisfaction during childbirth were less likely to breastfeed or to continue breastfeeding for long periods.

A traumatic birth can interfere with early bonding, causing mothers to feel emotionally detached or numb. This emotional detachment, coupled with societal pressure to breastfeed, can heighten mothers' feelings of inadequacy or guilt.

Some mothers describe feeling as if they are on autopilot, going through the motions of caring for their baby without emotional connection. Others describe an intense pressure to continue breastfeeding despite the psychological distress they were experiencing.

For others, breastfeeding can become a painful reminder of the trauma, deepening feelings of inadequacy or guilt. These psychological struggles can lead to mothers avoiding breastfeeding altogether to protect themselves from reliving the trauma.

Physical challenges can also have an impact. Recovering from a traumatic birth, especially after emergency interventions such as a c-section or instrumental delivery, can make breastfeeding physically demanding. Pain, fatigue, and restricted mobility can make positioning the baby or achieving a proper latch difficult. When combined with emotional distress, these physical hurdles can lead to frustration and to ending breastfeeding.

Mothers who experience birth trauma can face significant challenges with breastfeeding, but several strategies can help. One is trauma-informed care: an approach where healthcare providers understand and recognise the impact of trauma on a person's wellbeing.

Instead of focusing solely on the physical aspects of post-partum care, these professionals also consider the emotional and psychological challenges their patients might be facing. Compassionate healthcare providers can ensure mothers feel supported and understood.

For new mothers who have experienced a traumatic birth, this means receiving care that is tailored to the emotional scars of their traumatic experiences, ensuring they feel genuinely supported and understood.

Emotional support, through counselling or peer groups, can help mothers process traumatic experiences and reduces isolation.

Practical help from lactation consultants can address issues like latching and milk supply, making breastfeeding less stressful. Finally, a strong network of partners, family, and friends can provide reassurance and practical assistance, creating an environment where mothers feel empowered to navigate breastfeeding and recovery.

Motherhood after trauma

A traumatic start doesn't have to define the journey of motherhood. For some mothers, breastfeeding becomes a pathway to reclaiming control and heal. It can transform their trauma into a source of strength. In these cases, breastfeeding represents a personal triumph — a way to affirm their role as mothers. However, it's essential to balance determination with self-care. Seeking support is not a sign of failure but a necessary step toward recovery.

While breastfeeding offers numerous health benefits, it may not be essential for mother-child bonding in the long term.

Recent findings suggest that bonding quality does not significantly differ between breastfeeding and formula-feeding mothers.

Furthermore, the duration of breastfeeding does not necessarily impact the strength of the maternal bond. What truly matters is fostering a loving, supportive relationship – whether through breastfeeding or other nurturing interactions.

Birth trauma is undoubtedly a difficult beginning. With the right support, though, mothers can heal, regain confidence, and build strong bonds with their babies — whether through breastfeeding or other means.

Positive clinical care and understanding birth trauma are essential for supporting mothers. This can help them move from a challenging start to a fulfilling experience of motherhood. PTI

While breastfeeding offers numerous health benefits, it may not be essential for mother-child bonding in the long term ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

NATO's 2025 challenges: Trump, Ukraine & defence spending

NATO Chief Mark Rutte set the tone for the alliance's priorities for 2025 in an ominous speech highlighting just how close war is to the doorstep of the military alliance.

"From Brussels, it takes one day to drive to Ukraine," he said in a December speech at the Carnegie Europe think tank. "That's how close the Russian bombs are falling. It's how close the Iranian drones are flying. And not very much further, the North Korean soldiers are fighting."

Rutte made a case for public support of increased government defense spending and investment not only to strengthen European security, but also to aid Ukraine and deter Russia from expanding further.

Can more defence spending win over Trump?

Defence spending increases by NATO's European members would also likely help the alliance with its challenge of dealing with an unpredictable US President Donald Trump. While all recent US presidents have called for European nations to spend more on their defense, Trump is the only one who has threatened to abandon alliance members who fail to pony up.

In a bid to win Trump over, many European states met the pledge to spend 2per cent of their gross domestic product on defence in 2024. Now, as Trump prepares to take office for a second term, there are suggestions that NATO may up the spending target to 3per cent or even 4per cent.

"We will need more time to consult amongst allies what exactly the new level should be. But it is considerably more than 2per cent," Rutte confirmed. "Let me be very frank, if you would only spend more and not spend better, you have to go to at least 4per cent."

Experts have said Trump will likely push for 4per cent, and that the European allies would be well advised to offer deals he sees as favorable.

"Europeans need to offer a good deal to the US," Gesine Weber, a fellow with the German Marshall Fund, told DW in a written statement. "A model where the US could only be a 'backstop' or a 'defender of last resort,' while Europeans assure most of European conventional defense, could fulfill this criterion."

European efforts to bolster NATO — and where they fall short

There is consensus among NATO's European members that they must do more for their own defense by picking up on lagging defense production and plugging logistical gaps.

In 2024, NATO carried out the largest military exercises since the Cold War***PHOTO: ALBANIA DEFENCE MINISTRY***

In 2024, NATO held Steadfast Defender, its largest military exercise since the Cold War. In December, it decided to revise its 2015 hybrid warfare strategy as acts of suspected sabotage at Moscow's behest have risen over the last few years.

There has also been a concerted effort to increase troop deployments on NATO's borders. Germany, for instance, has decided to send 5,000 soldiers to Lithuania by 2027.

European NATO members face a particular disadvantage when it comes to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, such as satellites with a view of enemy territory or large transport helicopters that can carry bulky defense equipment and troops over a long distance.

Improvements over the next year are planned in this sector, but experts believe it will take more than a decade to develop the capabilities the Europeans currently depend on the US for.

"The Europeans have few satellites, and it can take up to 10 to 15 years to fill this gap," Rafael Loss, an expert on security and defense in the Euro-Atlantic area at the European Council on Foreign Relations, told DW. But the first challenge for European states is to shell out the cash such projects require, he added.

NATO's benefits reach beyond north Atlantic

NATO's European members argue that the alliance not only ensures security and prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic but also strengthens Washington's response to Beijing in the Indo-Pacific region.

The allies have enhanced ties with their four Asian partners — the so-called AP4 of Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan — to combat China and Russia's "no-limits" partnership. The NATO-AP4 cooperation is expected to grow in 2025 with more intelligence sharing.

"NATO's European members are trying to tell Trump's China hawks that abandoning NATO will make it much more difficult for them to confront China," Loss said.

How will Trump handle Ukraine?

As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine nears its third anniversary in February, European leaders have reiterated support for Kyiv but have no illusions that if the US cuts off aid, they will not be able to meet the shortfall.

Budget shortfalls at home have made wealthier European states reticent to make promises to Ukraine, especially without knowing if support from the United States, Ukraine's largest financial and military backer, will continue.

Ukrainian membership in NATO will also be "a major point of friction within the alliance," Kristine Berzina, the Washington-based managing director of GMF Geostrategy North, told DW.

NATO's European members generally support Ukrainian membership in the alliance — with Germany being an outlier — but that commitment would amount to mere lip service if the Trump administration opposes enlargement, Weber said.

According to Berzina, "[Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelenskyy is being very clear that Ukraine's future needs to be in NATO." But she added that incoming US vice president, JD Vance, "has expressed doubt about this trajectory."

French President Emmanuel Macron hosted Trump and Zelenskyy at the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral in December.

Experts said the goal was to soften Trump's stance on Ukraine and influence his policy in Kyiv's favor. But no one knows how Trump will proceed — "that's the big unknown," said Loss. *—DW News*

US announces $8B arms sale to Israel

US has faced calls for several months to implement an arms embargo against Israel

WASHINGTON DC, 5 JAN

The United States intends to sell USD8 billion in arms to Israel, sources familiar with the plan said.

President Joe Biden's administration has informally told the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the US Congress, which need to approve the sale, of the plan on Friday.

The arms package includes "munitions to support Israel's long-term security by resupplying stocks of critical munitions and air defence capabilities," one of the US officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 99 percent of arms imports for Israel between 2019 and 2023 came from the United States (69 per cent) and Germany (30per cent)

The US has faced calls for months to implement an arms embargo against Israel.

Despite Biden calling for an end to the war in Gaza, US policy has largely remained unchanged.

His administration has provided Israel with billions of dollars' worth of arms aid since the 7 October, 2024, attacks.

The sale includes medium-range air-to-air missiles for defence against airborne threats, 155 mm artillery shells for long-range targeting, Hellfire missiles and 500-pound bombs, among other weapons.

US President Joe Biden's administration has provided Israel with billions of dollars' worth of arms aid since 7 October, 2024, attacks **PHOTO: X**

Israeli forces launched a military campaign against Hamas and other militants in Gaza in response to their deadly 7 October, 2023, attack in southern Israel, which killed around 1,200 people and saw 251 hostages taken. Israel, the US, Germany and several other countries designate Hamas a terror organization.

Since then, more than 45,700 people have been killed in the war in Hamas-run Gaza since then, according to the Health Ministry.

News about the US arms sale comes as Israel and Hamas have confirmed talks on a hostage and ceasefire deal in Gaza that has resumed in Qatar's capital, Doha.

The indirect negotiations mediated by Qatar, Egypt, and the US have been going for months but have failed to end the war. *—DW News*

- Israel launched a military campaign against Hamas and other militants in Gaza in response to their deadly 7 Oct, 2023, attack in southern Israel, which killed around 1,200 people and saw 251 hostages taken

MELONI MEETS TRUMP AT FLORIDA CLUB

PALM BEACH, 5 JAN

US president-elect Donald Trump made an appearance with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who was visiting his Mar-a-Lago club.

Meloni follows Argentina President Javier Milei, who became the first world leader to meet with Trump at Mar-a-Lago after his Election Day victory in November. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungry also travelled to Florida to meet with the president-elect.

He appeared at a screening of a documentary detailing challenges some conservative lawyers report facing in the legal system. "I'm here with a fantastic woman. She's really taken Europe by storm, and everyone else, and we're just having dinner tonight," Trump said.

He watched a screening of the documentary with Meloni and with his Republican picks Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, as well as Florida Rep. Mike Waltz, Trump's choice for national security adviser and his choice to head the Treasury Department, Scott Bessent. *—PTI*

Biden honours Hillary, George Soros, Messi

WASHINGTON DC, 5 JAN

Outgoing US President Joe Biden has presented the US' highest civilian award to 19 people, including former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, football superstar Lionel Messi, controversial philanthropist George Soros and actor Denzel Washington, for their contributions to America and the world.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is presented to individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public or private endeavours. Former president Bill Clinton, several of his Cabinet members including Defence Secretary Loyd Austin were present.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk slammed Biden for awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to billionaire philanthropist George Soros. Musk described the decision as a "travesty". "A travesty that Biden is giving Soros the Medal of Freedom," he said on X. *—PTI*

US President Joe Biden presents the Presidential Medal of Freedomto former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton **PHOTO: PTI**

Former Greek PM Costas Simitis dies at 88

ATHENS, 5 JAN

Former Greek Prime Minister and key figure in Greece's accession to the euro, Costas Simitis died at the age of 88, as reported by state TV ERT. Simitis was taken to a hospital in Corinth early on Sunday after being found unconscious at his holiday home near Athens. An autopsy is expected to determine the cause of death. Co-founding the Socialist PASOK party in 1974, Simitis succeeded Andreas Papandreou in 1996, becoming known for his pragmatic approach. His tenure saw Greece join the eurozone in January 2001 and host the 2004 Olympic Games, with extensive infrastructure development under his administration. *—PTI*

World Bank to approve $20B loan for Pak

ISLAMABAD, 5 JAN

The World Bank is poised to approve a groundbreaking USD20 billion lending package for Pakistan, aimed at safeguarding projects from political upheaval. This 10-year initiative, known as the "Pakistan Country Partnership Framework 2025-35," will target six critical areas: reducing child stunting, fighting learning poverty, enhancing climate resilience, decarbonising the environment, increasing fiscal space, and boosting private investment.

Set to be approved by the World Bank board on 14 January, it is designed to maintain support across the political spectrum, shielding it from shifts in government priorities amid at least three expected general elections. The funding will comprise USD14 billion from the International Development Association and USD 6 billion from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, with an additional USD20 billion earmarked for private lending. *—PTI*

180M denied voting rights in Bangladesh

DHAKA, 5 JAN

Bangladesh's Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin on Sunday said that almost 180 million people have been denied their voting rights and the Election Commission wants to end their deprivation, The Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported. The CEC, while addressing the inaugural ceremony of a training programme for election officers ahead of a voter list updating exercise, said the Election Commission (EC) wants to remove the fact that the people have been deprived of the voting right for so long. "We want to remove the pain of their deprivation. We are steadfast in our commitment," he said. The countrywide door-to-door data collection for updating the list of possible voters will start on 20 January. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Nagasaki atomic bomb survivor dies at 93

TOKYO, 5 JAN

Shigemi Fukahori, a survivor of the 1945 Nagasaki atomic bombing, who devoted his life to advocating for peace has died. He was 93. Fukahori died at a hospital in Nagasaki, southwestern Japan, on 3 January, the Urakami Catholic Church, where he prayed almost daily until last year, said on Sunday. Local media reported he died of old age. The church, located about 500m from ground zero and near the Nagasaki Peace Park, is widely seen as a symbol of hope and peace, as its bell tower and some statues and survived the nuclear bombing. Fukahori was only 14 when the US dropped the bomb on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945, killing tens of thousands of people, including his family. *—PTI*

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Ukrainian drone attack kills Russian journalist

MOSCOW, 5 JAN

Russia's Izvestia newspaper reported that a Ukrainian "kamikaze" drone attack killed one of its freelance reporters, Alexander Martemyanov, while he was traveling on a highway in occupied eastern Ukraine.

According to Russia's state-owned RIA Novosti news agency, Martemyanov had been returning from reporting on shelling in the Russian-controlled city of Horlivka in Donetsk Oblast with colleagues when their vehicle was struck.

The attack also injured a journalist from RIA and four other media workers, the agency added.

"The car in which the journalist was traveling was attacked by a kamikaze drone. Martemyanov died of his wounds," Izvestia reported.

PHOTO: X

Originally a Soviet state newspaper, it is now owned by the National Media Group (NMG), a media conglomerate with significant state-controlled ownership and close ties to the Kremlin. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova called the incident "deliberate murder".

She described it as "another brutal crime in a series of bloody atrocities" carried out by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's government. *—Agencies*

Ukraine seeks enhanced air defences: Zelenskyy

KYIV, 5 JAN

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he will again call on allies to boost its air defences at this week's meeting in Germany, as US president-elect Donald Trump takes over later this month with a vow to end the almost three-year war quickly.

Zelenskyy said that dozens of partner countries will participate in the meeting of the Ramstein group at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Thursday, "including those who can help boost our capabilities not only to defend against missiles but also against guided bombs and Russian aviation."

US Defence Secretary Lloyd J Austin will attend the meeting. Biden was originally scheduled to attend the October summit in Ramstein but it was postponed because of Hurricane Milton.

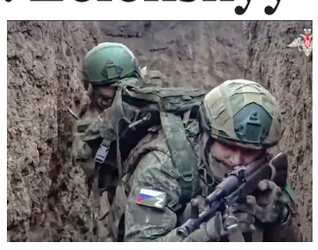


PHOTO: X

In its last few weeks in office, the Biden administration was pressing to send as much military aid as possible to Ukraine before Trump is sworn in 20 January. Trump claimed during his campaign that he could end the war in one day and his comments have put a question mark over whether the United States will continue to be Ukraine's biggest — and most important — military backer. *—PTI*

CHINA CONDEMNS US PLAN TO RESTRICT CHINESE DRONES

PHOTO: X

BEIJING, 5 JAN

The Biden administration's consideration of new regulations to restrict Chinese-made drones has elicited a sharp rebuke from China, which labelled the move as an "overstretching" of national security concepts. However, China has condemned the move.

The US Department of Commerce has initiated a rulemaking process aimed at potentially banning or restricting drones manufactured in China, particularly those produced by the Chinese firm DJI. This initiative follows a bipartisan inquiry from the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party, which raised concerns over the national security implications of these drones, especially their proximity to sensitive US military sites.

China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Mao Ning, said, "China firmly opposes the US overstretching the concept of national security," she remarked, adding that China would take necessary measures to protect its legitimate rights and interests. *—ANI*

Syria to resume int'l flights from Damascus airport next week

DAMASCUS, 5 JAN

Syria's Damascus airport will resume international flights on Tuesday for the first time since Bashar al-Assad was overthrown last month by armed opposition fighters.

No flights had taken off or landed since pro-Assad forces abandoned the airport in the Syrian capital on 8 December after the opposition fighters marched on the city following a lightning offensive that began on 27 November.

"We announce we will start receiving international flights to and from Damascus International Airport" from Tuesday, state news agency SANA said on Saturday, quoting Ashhad al-Salibi, who heads the General Authority of Civil Aviation and Air Transport.

"We reassure Arab and international airlines that we have begun the phase of rehabilitating the Aleppo and Damascus airports with our partners' help, so that they can welcome flights from all over the world," he said.

International aid planes and foreign diplomatic delegations have already been landing in Syria. Domestic flights resumed on 18 December, when a flight from Damascus left for Aleppo, according to the AFP news agency.

Syrian Airlines will resume flights from Damascus to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, starting on Tuesday, an employee told AFP, requesting anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Munich, Frankfurt flights halted amid bad weather

MUNICH, 5 JAN

Snow and ice have caused significant disruptions to flight operations at three major airports in Germany, leading to numerous cancellations. Munich Airport announced on its website that flights would be restricted and many would be cancelled on Sunday, 5 January, particularly during the morning. Frankfurt Airport echoed these warnings, advising travellers to verify their flight status before heading out. Of the 1,090 scheduled take-offs at Frankfurt, 120 flights were cancelled, affecting routes to destinations Paris, Venice, and Prague. *—DW News*

Heavy snow brings widespread disruption across UK

LONDON, 5 JAN

Heavy snow and freezing rain have brought widespread disruption across the UK, with several major airports forced to suspend flights and many key roads in the north of England unnavigable.

The National Grid, which oversees the country's electricity network, said it had been working to restore power after outages across the country. The company's live map shows power cuts in Birmingham in central England, Bristol in the west and Cardiff in Wales. *—PTI*

AMID FREEZING TEMPERATURES

Thousands protest for and against Yoon's arrest

SEOUL, 5 JAN

Thousands of protesters took to the streets of snowbound Seoul on Sunday, with rallies both in support of and against the impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol. The crisis-hit nation is poised for a high-stakes confrontation as an arrest warrant for Yoon looms, set to expire at midnight (1500 GMT) on Monday.

The warrant was issued following Yoon's refusal to comply with summons for investigation, prompting an attempted arrest on Friday by officials from the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials. That effort was thwarted by presidential security and the military, leading to a tense five-hour standoff.

In the bitter cold, anti-Yoon protesters rallied near his residence, demanding his arrest over his handling of martial law. "We must bring down the criminal Yoon Suk Yeol and detain him as soon as possible," declared Yang Kyung-soo from the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, a significant labour group involved in the demonstrations.

People protest demanding the arrest of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in Seoul, South Korea, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, groups of pro-Yoon supporters gathered nearby, holding placards claiming "Stop the Steal," a phrase borrowed from US political discourse. They condemned the impeachment and vowed to prevent any attempts to detain the embattled president.

On the legal front, authorities are exerting pressure on each other, with the anti-corruption agency urging acting President Choi Sang-mok to order compliance with the arrest warrant. However, Choi has remained silent on the issue.

Given the presence of presidential security, the anti-corruption agency has hinted that arresting Yoon within his residence may be "virtually impossible."

Meanwhile, Yoon's legal team is challenging the warrant, citing laws that protect locations containing military secrets from unwarranted searches. *—DW News*

Singapore concerned over 'sham marriages'

SINGAPORE, 5 JAN

Singapore authorities are concerned over the increase in "sham marriages or marriages of convenience" between Singaporean men and foreign women, which most of the time involves a syndicate and could lead to social problems.

The Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) has highlighted the concern and reported that "sham marriages" have increased to 32 cases between January and September last year compared to just four cases during the same period in 2023.

A media report cited ICA as saying that arrests of people involved in "sham marriages" followed vigorous investigations into a suspected syndicate arranging such arrangements between Singaporean men getting paid for marrying foreign women.

- Those convicted for their involvement in a marriage of convenience can be jailed for up to 10 years, fined up to SGD10,000, or both

"Sham marriages" in Singapore often involve a foreign woman paying a Singaporean man money for a union to be arranged, so she can get a permit to stay or work here, reported The Straits Times on Sunday.

A marriage of convenience is when two people tie the knot for the sole intention of acquiring an immigration advantage. Those convicted for their involvement in a marriage of convenience can be jailed for up to 10 years, fined up to SGD10,000, or both. *—PTI*

NTPC Renewable Energy bags 1K-MW solar power project

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

NTPC Renewable Energy Ltd has secured a 1,000-MW solar power project from Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd (UPPCL). NTPC REL secured a capacity of 1,000 MW at a tariff of Rs 2.56/kWh, a regulatory filing said on Saturday. According to the filing, the letter of award from UPPCL is awaited. NTPC Renewable Energy Limited (NTPC REL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of NTPC Green Energy Ltd (NGEL), has emerged as a successful bidder in the e-reverse auction conducted by UPPCL, it stated. The auction, aimed at "selection of solar power developers for setting up 2,000 MW ISTS-connected solar PV power projects. *—PTI*

ICAR member urges Modi to appoint visionary chief

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

A member of the country's top agricultural research body ICAR on Sunday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to appoint a new director general with global expertise to revitalise the organisation ahead of the current chief's retirement next month. Venugopal Badaravada, a member of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's (ICAR) Governing Body, said the leadership transition presents an opportunity to reform the organisation amid allegations of corruption, nepotism and recruitment irregularities. The current Director General Himanshu Pathak is set to retire in February. Badaravada urged bringing in leadership from outside ICAR to drive systemic reforms and enhance transparency. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

NHAI prepays ₹56,000 cr to its lenders in FY25

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has pre-paid loans of worth Rs 56,000 crore during the current fiscal, helping the state-owned agency to save interest cost of around Rs 1,200 crore, a senior government official said on Sunday. The official told PTI that NHAI's total debt at the beginning of the current fiscal year was pegged at Rs 3.35 lakh crore, which stood at about Rs 2.76 lakh crore at the end of third quarter of 2024-25 fiscal year. He further said that around Rs 15,700 crore has been pre-paid from the InvIT monetisation proceeds, while Rs 40,000 crore prepayment of loan has been made to National Small Saving Fund (Rs 30,000 crore) and State Bank of India (Rs 10,000 crore), which charge high interest rates. *—PTI*

Crystal Crop buys Bayer's bizz in Asian expansion

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Agrochemical firm Crystal Crop Protection on Sunday said it has acquired the herbicide active ingredient Ethoxysulfuron from Germany's Bayer AG for sales in select Asian markets, in a deal expected to boost its earnings by 20 per cent. The acquisition includes Bayer's 'Sunrice' trademark and mixture products containing Ethoxysulfuron, along with all related registrations. The herbicide is used to control broad-leaved weeds and sedges in rice and cereal crops. This marks Crystal's 13th strategic acquisition and its second purchase from Bayer, following its 2021 acquisition of Bayer's Indian seed portfolio for cotton, pearl millet and mustard. The company plans to manufacture the product locally to provide cost-effective solutions for farmers in markets including India, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Pakistan. *—PTI*

Indian tech firms corner 1/5th of US H1B visas

Infosys took lead with 8,140 beneficiaries, followed by TCS

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Indian-origin tech companies cornered a fifth of all H1B visas issued by the US with Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services leading the pack, an analysis of data from US immigration department showed.

According to data from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, in April-September 2024 period, out of the total 1.3 lakh H1B visas issued to different employers, about 24,766 visas were issued to Indian-origin companies.

Out of these, Infosys took the lead with 8,140 beneficiaries, followed by TCS (5,274), and HCL America (2,953).

Infosys came second to only Amazon Com Services LLC, which topped with 9,265 visas.

Cognizant, which was founded in Chennai but now has headquarters in New Jersey, ranked third in the list with 6,321 visas.

The future of the H1B visa will likely depend on balancing the needs of the US businesses for skilled labour **PHOTO: X**

H1B visa programme allows US companies to temporarily employ foreign workers in specialty occupations. Indian companies have been significant beneficiaries of this programme, particularly in the technology sector.

Major Indian IT services firms such as Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, Wipro, and HCL Technologies have consistently ranked among the top employers for H1B visa holders. Wipro was lower down this time with 1,634 visa grants. Tech Mahindra stood close by, having been issued 1,199 visas.

While these companies continue to benefit from the programme, ongoing developments indicate a need for adaptation in response to regulatory changes and public sentiment. The future of the H1B visa will likely depend on balancing the needs of the US businesses for skilled labour with broader immigration policy reforms.

Elon Musk, a former H-1B visa holder whose company Tesla utilises this programme, has publicly supported the tech industry's reliance on foreign workers.

In a post on X on 28 December, Musk emphasised the importance of welcoming individuals from all backgrounds who contribute to the US through hard work. He passionately advocated for preserving America as a land of freedom and opportunity. *—PTI*

Mcap of 4 of top 10 firms erodes by Rs 96,605.66 crore

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

The combined market valuation of four of the top-10 most valued firms eroded by Rs 96,605.66 crore last week, with HDFC Bank taking the biggest hit.

While Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and State Bank of India suffered erosion from their valuation, Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, ITC, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and Hindustan Unilever were the winners. Together they added Rs 82,861.16 crore in combined market valuation.

The market valuation of HDFC Bank tumbled Rs 37,025.46 crore to Rs 13,37,919.84 crore.

ICICI Bank's valuation slumped Rs 29,324.55 crore to Rs 8,93,378.50 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of TCS tanked Rs 24,856.26 crore to Rs 14,83,144.53 crore and that of State Bank of India declined Rs 5,399.39 crore to Rs 7,08,168.60 crore.

However, the mcap of Reliance Industries surged Rs 41,138.41 crore to Rs 16,93,373.48 crore.

The valuation of Hindustan Unilever soared Rs 15,331.08 crore to Rs 5,65,194.18 crore.

The mcap of LIC jumped Rs 13,282.49 crore to Rs 5,74,689.29 crore and that of Infosys zoomed Rs 9,031.19 crore to Rs 8,04,834.34 crore.

ITC's valuation climbed Rs 3,878.63 crore to Rs 6,03,064.44 crore and that of Bharti Airtel went up Rs 199.36 crore to Rs 9,10,934.58 crore.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 524.04 points, or 0.66 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 191.35 points. *—PTI*

FMCG firms brace for inflation's impact on Q3 growth

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is grappling with decreased gross margins and subdued operating profits for the October-December quarter, driven by inflation and rising input costs. Analysts anticipate a modest increase in revenues for several FMCG companies, who are returning to a value-driven growth model.

Many firms, including Dabur and Marico, have reported low single-digit revenue growth due to necessary price hikes implemented to counter escalating costs of raw materials like copra and palm oil. Urban consumption has suffered due to high food inflation, while rural markets, which represent over a third of the FMCG landscape, have shown resilience.

Dabur forecasts low single-digit growth and flat operating profits for the quarter, citing inflationary pressures in certain segments, mitigated by strategic price increases and cost-efficiency efforts. "Rural consumption continues to grow faster than urban," the company noted.

Similarly, Marico indicated that rural demand remained steady, while urban demand faced challenges from inflation and stagnant wage growth. The firm anticipates a modest rise in operating profits, albeit with higher-than-expected gross margin contraction, chiefly due to firm copra prices and rising vegetable oil costs.

Nuvama highlights that urban demand is likely to remain sluggish for the next few quarters, focusing on the impact of inflation on consumer behaviour, particularly in essential categories such as soaps and snacks. Analysts suggest that the upcoming harvest season may alleviate some pressure on input costs in the coming months. *—PTI*

Analysts suggest that the upcoming harvest season may alleviate some pressure on input costs in the coming months **PHOTO: ANI**

- Analysts anticipate a modest increase in revenues for several FMCG companies, who are returning to a value-driven growth model

THIS WEEK

Global trends & FII to drive markets

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

PHOTO:PTI

The equity markets in the upcoming week are expected to respond to global trends, the trading activities of foreign investors, and the impending quarterly earnings reports, with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) set to initiate the results calendar on Thursday. Analysts indicate that macroeconomic data releases and fluctuations in the rupee against the dollar will also impact market movements.

The Q3 FY25 earnings season begins with prominent IT firms and financial institutions due to report results. TCS and Tata Elxsi will disclose their figures on Thursday, 9 January, 2025, drawing investor attention to individual stock performances. Following this earnings season, market focus is likely to shift toward the forthcoming Union Budget and policy decisions from the Trump 2.0 administration, according to Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst at Swastika Investmart Ltd.

In recent weeks, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have been net sellers while domestic institutional investors (DIIs) are actively purchasing, leading to a notable tug-of-war that could influence market direction.

Ajit Mishra, SVP of Research at Religare Broking Ltd, highlighted that the earnings reports, particularly from TCS, could provide a critical catalyst that might reverse the ongoing trend of FII outflows. Additionally, key economic data, including the HSBC services PMI and industrial production figures, will be closely observed for further insights. *—PTI*

New office supply falls 6% across top 8 cities: Report

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

India's eight major office markets saw a 6 per cent annual decline in fresh supply of workspaces during 2024, even as the demand hit an all-time high, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

Real estate consultant Cushman & Wakefield (C&W) data showed that new supply of office space stood at 451.5 lakh square feet in 2024 as against 477.9 lakh sq ft in the preceding year.

New supply declined in Delhi-NCR, Pune, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Ahmedabad, while it jumped in Mumbai and rose marginally in Bengaluru.

Among cities, the new office space supply in Mumbai jumped more than 4 times to 83.2 lakh sq ft in 2024 from 20.5 lakh sq ft in the preceding year.

In Bengaluru, the new supply grew to 133.4 lakh sq ft from 133.1 lakh sq ft.

However, Delhi-NCR witnessed a 5 per cent fall in new supply to 46.8 lakh sq ft from 49.2 lakh sq ft. *—PTI*

JK Lakshmi requests 18% GST on cement

PATNA, 5 JAN

Arun Shukla, President and Director of JK Lakshmi Cement, has urged the government to reduce the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on cement from 28 per cent to 18 per cent during the upcoming Budget session. He made this request during the 'Bihar Business Connect 2024' event, emphasizing that lowering GST is crucial to enhancing consumption of this vital building material, which is anticipated to grow at an average annual rate of 7-8 per cent.

The company, which is investing Rs 500 crore to establish a manufacturing plant in Madhubani district, has received positive support from the Bihar government. Shukla praised the state's commitment to fulfilling promises, describing his experience in Bihar as "encouraging."

JK Lakshmi Cement currently has an annual capacity of 18 million tonnes, with plans to expand to 30 million tonnes by 2030. Despite electoral disruptions in 2024, Shukla remains optimistic about future demand, predicting a CAGR of 7-8 per cent. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Punjab & Sind Bank starts GST-based MSME loans

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

State-owned Punjab & Sind Bank plans to launch instant loan scheme up to Rs 25 lakh for the MSME sector during this month as part of its initiative to push credit through its digital platform.

As part of its transformative agenda, the bank has already introduced digital home loan and vehicle loan schemes under which in-principle approval to an application is given within 15 minutes.

This automated approach eliminates manual intervention at the processing and sanctioning stage, enhancing the speed, efficiency, and customer experience, he said.

After initial success on the retail side, he said, the bank has lined up similar product for MSME (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises) borrowers up to the loan limit of Rs 25 lakh to begin with.

The product is almost ready and final checking of the system and processes are being done before the launch planned later this month, he said.

The best part of such digital products is that the loans can be sanctioned even during the holidays, he said, adding, default risks in such sanctions are very low.

The bank is also working on to provide collateral-free loan under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) of up to Rs 50,000 through its digital platform soon, he said.

These new product initiatives, he said, are a testament to the bank's dedication to making a positive societal impact and creating a more sustainable future for all. *—PTI*

This automated approach eliminates manual intervention at the processing and sanctioning stage **PHOTO: X**

'RELATIONSHIP PROOF MUST'

Unmarried couples no longer welcome, OYO changes check-in rules

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Travel booking major OYO has launched a new check-in policy for partner hotels, starting from Meerut, introducing guidelines effective this year whereby unmarried couples will no longer be welcome to check in.

Under the revised policy, all couples will be asked to present valid proof of relationship at the time of check-in, including for bookings made online. OYO has empowered its partner hotels' discretion to decline couple bookings based on their judgment, aligning with local social sensibility, the company said.

OYO has given the directive to its partner hotels in Meerut to ensure this with immediate effect. Based on ground feedback, the company may expand this to more cities, people familiar with the policy change said.

Pawas Sharma, Region Head, OYO North India, told PTI, "OYO is committed to upholding safe and responsible hospitality practices. While we respect individual freedoms and personal liberty, we also recognise our responsibility to listen to and work with the law enforcement and civil society groups in the micro markets we operate in. We will continue to review this policy and its impact."

Additionally, the programme aims to encourage longer stays and repeat bookings, enhancing trust and loyalty.

OYO has started pan-India initiatives such as joint seminars on safe hospitality with police and hotel partners, blacklisting hotels reportedly promoting immoral activities and initiating actions against unauthorised hotels using OYO branding, it added. *—PTI*

Under the revised policy, all couples will be asked to present valid proof of relationship at the time of check-in **PHOTO: X**

PHOTO: X

Auto leasing in India to hit 8% in 5-8 years: ORIX

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Mobility solutions and financial services provider ORIX Corporation India Ltd expects automobile leasing market in India to account for 7-8 per cent of the overall vehicle sales in the next 5-7 years, up from about 2 per cent currently with more younger people joining the workforce, its Managing Director and CEO Vivek Wadhera.

With good traction in its business, the company expects 30-35 per cent higher profit this fiscal year compared to the last year, Wadhera told PTI in an interaction.

In 2024, passenger vehicle sales in India stood at 43 lakh units as per industry estimates.

In the western market such as the US, or even Japan or China, the same percentage is 30-40 per cent, he added. It is a trend even witnessed in the real estate segment, he noted, adding that it is a generational change in mindset. *—PTI*

Play domestic cricket: Gambhir to seniors

The head coach says Rohit and Kohli will decide what is best for Indian cricket

Gautam Gambhir PHOTO: X

SYDNEY, 5 JAN

India head coach Gautam Gambhir said on Sunday that struggling stars Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli "still have the hunger to excel" but urged all senior players, including the duo, to play domestic games and show their "commitment" towards red-ball cricket.

Known for his plain speak, the two-time World Cup hero also didn't give any assurances on whether Rohit or Kohli will be a part of the Test set-up moving forward.

Both the stars were woefully out of form during the just-concluded Test series against Australia that the visitors lost 1-3 to surrender the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as well as a spot in the World Test Championship final.

"It's not the right moment right now for me to talk about where we are going to be after five months. A lot of things change in sport. Forms change, people change, attitude changes, everything changes in sport. And we all know that five months is a long time," Gambhir said at the post-series press conference.

"So let's see before the England series (in July) what's going to happen. But whatever will happen, will happen for the best interest of Indian cricket," asserted the former opener.

Rohit scored 31 runs in five innings before dropping himself from the playing eleven and Kohli managed 190 in nine knocks, including a second innings century after India had taken a lead of more than 300. A glaring failure for Kohli was his inability to avoid being dismissed on deliveries that were bowled outside the off stump.

Kohli last played a Ranji Trophy match in 2012 while Rohit's most recent domestic red-ball game was in the 2015-16 season.

He refused to be drawn into a discussion on the much-speculated future of Kohli and Rohit, insisting that they are the best judge when it comes to analysing their role in Indian cricket.

"See, I can't talk about the future of any player, it's up to them as well. But yes, what I can say is that they still have the hunger, they still have the passion, they're tough people and hopefully they can continue to take Indian cricket forward," he said. —PTI

Konstas had no right to talk to Bumrah: Gambhir

India head coach Gautam Gambhir has lambasted Australian youngster Sam Konstas for his aggressive run-in with Jasprit Bumrah during the fifth and final Test here, saying the 19-year-old had no "right" to talk to the Indian captain. Konstas was seen talking animatedly with Bumrah after the pace spearhead dismissed Usman Khawaja on day one of the game. The match ended with Australia winning by six wickets for a 3-1 series triumph here on Sunday. "It's a tough sport played by tough men. You can't be that soft, as simple as it can get. I don't think there was anything intimidating about it," Gambhir said. —PTI

GAMBHIR PRAISES SCG TRACK, GAVASKAR CALLS IT 'NOT IDEAL'

SYDNEY, 5 JAN

The SCG track was "not ideal" for a Test match, according to batting great Sunil Gavaskar but India head coach Gautam Gambhir praised the wicket as "spicy" and "result-oriented", which had something for everyone.

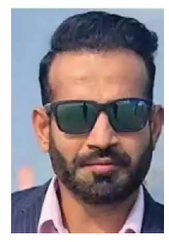
"It's been some really nice wickets. It's good for Test cricket as well. There was enough for the bowlers, and there was enough for the batters as well. But that is what's going to keep Test cricket alive," Gambhir said during the press conference after India lost the fifth Test .

Gavaskar, however, had criticised the SCG track during the final session on Saturday.

"When I saw the pitch, I did say the cows could have gone and grazed on it," Gavaskar said on ABC Sport.

"This is not the ideal Test match pitch that you want because you want it to go into the fourth or the fifth day. Unless there is rain, I don't see us being here on day four."

He said it would have attracted criticism from Australian and England cricketers if a similar wicket had been provided in India. "All hell would have broken loose. There would have been all kinds of innuendos, all sorts of comments about 'Is this a good pitch?'" he said. "Even former players who played on this pitch before were so surprised. We had Glenn McGrath saying he'd never seen that much grass on the pitch. The point is, when you go overseas, you have to be prepared to play on the surface." He also criticised former players for complaining about tough Indian pitches. —PTI



When was the last time Virat Kohli played domestic cricket? We need to end superstar culture, we need team culture. You need to improve yourself and improve the Indian team.

-Irfan Pathan, Former pacer

It's always been a wonderful contest. More than just the runs that he scored, Virat brings a bit of theatre to the game which is sometimes good and sometimes it can rile you up as an opposition

-Pat Cummins, Australian skipper

Gavaskar upset over BGT presentation snub

SYDNEY, 5 JAN

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Sunday expressed his displeasure after not being invited to present the trophy, named after him and Allan Border, to Australia following their win over India in the high-voltage five-match rubber.

Australia reclaimed the Border-Gavaskar trophy after 10 years with a six-wicket win over India in the fifth and final Test.

Border presented the trophy to the home team but Gavaskar, despite being at the venue at the same time, was inexplicably ignored.

"I certainly would have loved to have been there for the presentation. After all it is the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and it is about Australia and India," Gavaskar was quoted as saying by Code Sports."I mean, I am here on the ground. To me it should not matter that Australia won when it comes to the presentation. They played better cricket so they won. That's fine.

"Just because I am an Indian. I would have been happy to present the trophy with my good friend Allan Border," he added. Had the Indian team won the trophy, Gavaskar would have been invited to present it to the victorious side. Cricket Australia (CA) later confirmed that Gavaskar was aware he would have presented the award to Indian captain Jasprit Bumrah if the tourists had won the Sydney Test and retained the trophy. —PTI

Boxing must make all right moves for LA 2028: Lovlina

GUWAHATI, 5 JAN

With boxing's future as an Olympic sport hanging in the balance, India's star pugilist Lovlina Borgohain on Sunday asserted that "all the right moves must be made" to ensure its presence at the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

Boxing was not on the initial programme for the Los Angeles Olympics and a decision on its inclusion is awaited.

Lovlina is now part of the Athletes Commission of the newly formed Asian unit of World Boxing.

"It's a huge privilege to be on this committee as India will now have a voice in decision making," said Lovlina, pointing out that boxing's technicalities, "especially scoring and judging" needed closer and impartial introspection.

"Till now, India was just an ordinary member with very little chance to raise a protest or point out a flaw in the system. That is going to change now since we will have seven positions in the Asian body.

Lovlina, who won a bronze at Tokyo Olympics in 2021 but returned empty-handed from Paris 2024, said Los Angeles was very much in her plans.

India's versatile lawn bowler, Nayanmoni Saikia on Sunday, accompanied Lovlina. Nayanmoni is a multiple gold medallist at the Commonwealth Games and the Arjuna Awardee is a popular face in Assam.

Both Lovlina and Nayanmoni took part in the Fit India Sundays on Cycle mission and stressed on the "no drugs" campaign undertaken by the Union Sports Ministry. —PTI

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City finds form with back-to-back wins

LONDON, 5 JAN

Erling Haaland and Manchester City might just be turning the corner after the team's worst run of results under Pep Guardiola.

Haaland scored twice in a 4-1 win over West Ham as City secured back-to-back victories in the Premier League for the first time since late October, when a shocking and unthinkable six-week meltdown began.

In that time, the defending champions played nine league games and won just once, dropping them out of the Champions League qualification spots and raising questions about Guardiola's stomach for a rebuild.

Now, City can hope for better times ahead — especially after making up ground on second-placed Arsenal and fourth-placed Chelsea after they both dropped points in draws at Brighton and Crystal Palace, respectively. Arsenal was held to 1-1 at Brighton, which equalised from the penalty spot through Joao Pedro, and missed the chance to trim the gap to Liverpool to three points. Ethan Nwaneri put Arsenal ahead.

Chelsea's winless run in the league extended to four matches after drawing at Palace 1-1. —PTI

Cherry on Top: Nitesh on Arjuna Award

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

In a season of discontent among some Paralympic medallists over a perceived snub in the annual national honours, para-shuttler Kumar Nitesh is grateful and elated in equal measure after being finalised for the Arjuna award, determined to work harder for a Khel Ratna in near future.

The 30-year-old from Haryana lost his left leg in a train accident in 2009. But he managed to fight his circumstances to become an IIT Mandi graduate before a maiden Paralympic gold in Paris, defeating Great Britain's Daniel Bethell in a gripping men's singles SL3 badminton final in September last year.

"It is a huge achievement, like it's the second highest sports award in India. And it's a very good recognition for the achievements of an athlete," Nitesh told PTI.

The winners of Arjuna award receive Rs 15 lakh in cash prize, a citation and a statuette of Arjuna, a peerless archer in Indian mythology. Thirty two athletes, including a record 17 para-athletes, have been finalised this year along with four for Khel Ratna -- the country's highest sporting award. President Droupadi Murmu will bestow the annual honours on 17 January at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. —PTI

N Zealand trump Sri Lanka by 9 wickets in ODI series

WELLINGTON, 5 JAN

New Zealand won the first ODI of the series against sri Lanka at the Basin Reserve in Wellington on Sunday. The hosts won the toss and opted to bowl first. New Zealand's bowlers dominated the Sri Lankan top order, reducing them to a precarious 23/4 within the first 10 overs. Pathum Nissanka (9), Kusal Mendis (2), Kamindu Mendis (3), and Charith Asalanka (duck) all fell early.

Sri Lanka found brief relief through Avishka Fernando and Janith Liyanage, who shared an 87-run stand for the fifth wicket. Fernando made 56 off 63 balls, and Liyanage contributed 36 off 54.

At 110/6, Chamindu Wickramasinghe (22 off 42) and Wanindu Hasaranga (35 off 33) put together a brief 48-run stand for the seventh wicket before the tailenders were dismissed quickly. For New Zealand, Matt Henry starred with four wickets, while Jacob Duffy and Nathan Smith took two each, and Mitchell Santner chipped in with one. —PTI

Barcelona into Copa del Rey last 16

MADRID, 5 JAN

Barcelona endured another setback while trying to register Dani Olmo and cruised past fourth-division club Barbastro 4-0 in the Copa del Rey.

After the Spanish league and national federation again denied Barcelona's request to register Olmo and Pau Víctor for the rest of the season, Hansi Flick's team routed Barbastro in the round of 32. Robert Lewandowski scored twice and Eric García and Pablo Torre added goals.

PHOTO: PTI

It was Barcelona's first win after consecutive losses in La Liga to end last year.

Another setback would have added to the embarrassment of not being able to register Olmo and Víctor because of a missed deadline to comply with the league's financial fair-play rules.

The players were only registered through the end of 2024 and Barcelona failed to reinstate them to the squad because it couldn't clear enough salary cap space.

Barcelona eventually was able to meet the financial fair-play rules but the league and the federation said on Saturday that the players can't be registered again after already having been dropped because of the missed deadline. The club is expected to resort to the courts to try to register the players. Barcelona eliminated Barbastro at the same stage of the Copa last season. —PTI

FORCED TO RETIRE

Osaka suffers abdominal injury in run-up to Australian Open

AUCKLAND, 5 JAN

Naomi Osaka has retired from the final of the Auckland Classic with an abdominal injury, a blow to the Japanese star just a week before the start of the Australian Open.

Playing in her first WTA final for three years, against Denmark's Clara Tauson, the four-time Grand Slam champion called for the physio after taking the opening set 6-4 and pulled out shortly afterwards on Sunday.

Osaka's sudden withdrawal from the Australian Open warm-up event came as a shock after playing with no apparent problem in the 35-minute opening set, unleashing some powerful groundstrokes to break her opponent in the third and fifth games.

At the changeover, the 27-year-old stood and performed a series of stretches during a medical timeout.

After consulting with the trainer, she shook the hand of Tauson, who picked up a third career title and her first since 2021.

Osaka did not divulge details of what forced her withdrawal in a short courtside interview.

"I just want to thank everyone for welcoming me to such a beautiful city and I had a lot of fun playing here and I'm really sorry about how it ended," Osaka said.

"I hope you did enjoy the tennis that we did play and I'm just really grateful to be here."

It was an anti-climactic finish to the week for Osaka, who was chasing her first title in four years since winning the 2021 Australian Open.

- Her most recent final appearance was at the Miami Open the following year, before taking a 15-month break and giving birth to her first child midway through 2023. She returned to tennis 12 months ago and has climbed to 57th in the world rankings

Her most recent final appearance was at the Miami Open the following year, before taking a 15-month break and giving birth to her first child midway through 2023.

She returned to tennis 12 months ago and has climbed to 57th in the world rankings.

Osaka arrived in Auckland professed her "deep love" of tennis was returning and voiced confidence about the possibility of a strong campaign at the year's first Grand Slam, starting in Melbourne on 12 January. —Agencies

Playing in her first WTA final for three years, Osaka called for the physio after taking the opening set 6-4 PHOTO: X

DCCI names squad for Disabled Champions Trophy

NEW DELHI, 5 JAN

Vikrant Ravindra Keni was on Sunday named as captain of the 17-member Indian squad for the Physically Disabled Champions Trophy, beginning in Sri Lanka from 12 January. The Differently Abled Cricket Council of India's (DCCI) national selection panel picked the team after an intensive training camp in Jaipur under head coach Rohit Jalani. The Squad: Vikrant Ravindra Keni (captain), Ravindra Gopinath Sante (vice-captain), Yogender Singh (wk), Akhil Reddy, Radhika Prasad, Dependra Singh (wk), Akash Anil Patil, Sunny Goyat, Pawan Kumar, Jithendra, Narendra, Rajesh, Nikhil Manhas, Amir Hassan, Majid Magray, Kunal Dattatray Phanase and Surendra. —PTI

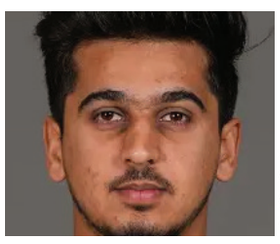


PHOTO: X

Test series: Blow for Pak as Ayub suffers ankle fracture

CAPE TOWN, 5 JAN

Pakistan has been dealt a significant blow as opening batter Saim Ayub has been ruled out for up to six weeks due to a right ankle fracture. The injury occurred on the first morning of the ongoing Test in Cape Town on Saturday, leaving Ayub side-lined for key upcoming fixtures, as per ESPNcricinfo. The injury diagnosis means Ayub will miss Pakistan's two-Test series against the West Indies later this month, as well as the tri-series against South Africa and New Zealand scheduled for February. The young talent is now racing against time to recover in time for the Champions Trophy, which kicks off in Karachi in just over six weeks. An MRI scan on Friday confirmed the fracture, and Ayub has been placed in an ankle medical moon boot to immobilize the injury. —ANI

Lille's unbeaten run hits 18 with draw against Nantes

PARIS, 5 JAN

Lille extended its unbeaten run to 18 matches overall after drawing at home with lowly Nantes 1-1 in Ligue 1. Lille remained in fourth place, two points behind Monaco and Marseille, which plays on Sunday. New signing Anthony Lopes was in the Nantes goal. He joined after playing nearly 500 games for Lyon. Lopes was beaten in the 41st minute when defender Gabriel volleyed in the rebound after winger Remy's curler came back off the crossbar. French forward Matthis equalized for 15th-placed Nantes. Elsewhere, Augustine Boakye got his first goals for Saint-Etienne and new Norwegian coach Eirik Horneland celebrated his first game in charge of the club in a 3-1 win against Reims. —PTI

Rybakina defends ex-coach after WTA suspension

SYDNEY, 5 JAN

"I'm working with Goran. I'm happy (with) the way we are working now for a couple of weeks," Rybakina said. Sixth-ranked Elena Rybakina has defended her former coach Stefano Vukov after he was provisionally suspended by the WTA as the governing body investigates a potential breach of its code of conduct. Rybakina said this week that Vukov is rejoining her team but the WTA suspension means the Croat won't be accredited to enter player-only areas including practice courts and training areas. On Saturday, the 2022 Wimbledon champion told a press conference in Sydney that Vukov "never mistreated me" in their years working together. " I respect him for everything he did from the very beginning when I was ranked 200 all the way what we did," Rybakina said. —PTI